

# 異世界料理道

VOLUME  
11

Author.

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Illust.

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Cooking with  
wild game.



# **COOKING WITH WILD GAME**

– Isekai Ryouridou –

**- VOLUME 11 -**

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**[ Skythewood ]**



「あら……」

お目覚めになられたのですね……?」

どきりと心臓が跳ね上がる。

声のあがった方向に視線を動かすと、

枕側の屏風の向こうから、

ゆらりとその人物は姿を現した。

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Cooking with wild game.

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「……………どうかなさいましたか……………」

白い靄の向こうでシラオン＝チェルが微笑んでいる。  
その手が背中のように回されたかと思うと、  
白い長衣がしゅるりと足もとに滑り落とされた。

「な、な、何を

してるんですか、

あなたは!？」

「何、と申されましても……

わたくしはアスタ様の身支度を  
お手伝いするように命じられて  
おりますゆえ……」





本当に美しい女性だった。

十七年間に及ぶ俺の生において、  
彼女ほど美しい女性に出会ったことはないと思う。

「やはり、間違いはなかったようだ」

その女性は、大きくはないが鋼のような強さを持った声で、そう言った。



# Chapter 1

## Day of Change

### 1

The fifth day of the White Month.

Even in the morning itself, we didn't notice any signs that things had changed.

Four days ago... In the first night of the White month, Uncle Dora was attacked by bandits. The next afternoon, Milano Mast's daughter was harassed by ruffians, and that night, someone infiltrated the Zaza house. Then on the next night, we had to face the son of Goram, Geta, at the Fa house. So much happened just in the first three days of the White Month.

And, of course, we had to spend these days tensely. But as if it was a mockery of our nervousness, the fourth day of the White Month passed by without any incident. We then ushered in the morning of the fifth day feeling as if we had wasted our time.

As I was loading the cargo onto the wagon, Ai Fa reminded me with a serious face: "Asuta, don't let your guard down. People tend to get sloppy during times like this."

Ai Fa had already decided to perform guard duty every other day, and she was staying home today. I braced myself mentally, then nodded firmly and said: "I understand."

"You be careful too, Ai Fa. The number of kiba in the area is increasing, right?"

"Yes. There will be even more kiba next month. Yesterday, a man from the Lan house was severely injured."

"Really? That's worrying."

The morning sun and soft breeze were very comfortable; this was an incredibly peaceful morning. But we were talking about something morbid that didn't fit this serenity.

“By the way, will the Fa and Lan houses have a hunting offseason like the Wu clan?”

Ai Fa who was gently stroking Gilulu’s neck looked back at me with a surprised grunt.

“As I told you before, the kiba migrates periodically to forage for food. After eating the berries, roots, and critters, they would shift from the north to the south, and south to the north frequently in search of bountiful pastures.”

“Yes. They will go down to the villages outside the forest sporadically and ravage the farmlands of Genos, correct? I still remember that.”

“Yes. During their constant migration, some parts of the forest won’t bear fruit after being depleted extensively. And the kiba won’t go to these places, and the hunters living in that area will rest during that period of time. This happens three times a year, so there aren’t any rules to say which house should rest in which month.”

“Oh, so every house will get to rest three times a year.”

“That’s how it is. The flora in the vicinity is being eaten rapidly. It will be our turn to rest in less than a month.”

“I see, that’s great.”

I couldn’t help smiling, but Ai Fa tilted her head puzzlingly.

“What’s so good about it? When the time comes, the Fa house and the neighboring Fou and Lan houses won’t be able to hunt kiba, so we can’t ensure there is enough meat.”

“The Wu clan should have started hunting again by then, so it will be fine. And in the near future, I should be able to procure meat from the Sauti clan. And so... Leaving that aside, I’m happy that Ai Fa can get to rest.”

“I will need to train during the offseason. It isn’t much when compared to hunting, but it’s nothing to be happy about either.”

Ai Fa was acting cold.

“And the issue with the nobles might not get resolved before the hunting offseason.



Even if I rest my body, I can't rest my mind."

"Ehh, is that so... But if this problem is solved, Ai Fa can rest properly. The thought of that still makes me happy."

At the very least, Ai Fa could take half a month's break from the dangerous work of hunting kiba, which made me glad. But Ai Fa pouted for unknown reasons.

"It's good if I don't need to work as an escort, but I won't have any excuse to visit the Post Station Town then."

"Hmm? What's wrong with that?"

"...It's boring for me to be home alone."

I was very surprised. I didn't expect to hear that from Ai Fa.

"Ah, but... I can't stop my work in the Post Station Town for half a month, right?"

Ai Fa leaned her head in front of me and said: "Of course." For Ai Fa, this might just be a substitute for kicking my leg.

"I'm just mad that you are living your life without any regards of my opinion. You lack concern for your house head."

"B-But I'm resting once every ten days. Since the offseason will last for half a month, it will overlap with my off day once or twice, correct? When the time comes, I will do my best to not let you feel dull."

Ai Fa's head stopped moving.

She then stared at my face from very close up.

"By the way, Asuta, your first off day will be soon, correct?"

"Yes, that's right. The 7th and 8th day of the White Month, which is the day after tomorrow, and another day after that."

"I will go to the forest every other day for that time then. I hunted two kiba the day



before yesterday; it's a little too tiring."

"In that case, you should rest."

"Yes, that's right... I finally understand why you are so happy about this."

Ai Fa said from a distance close enough for me to feel her breath and smiled brilliantly. I didn't expect her to smile at all.

"Asuta, this is your first rest day since the House Head Conference, correct?"

"Yes, that's true."

"We worked apart during the House Head Conference, right until dusk. You were busy with food preparation for your stall before and after the Conference too. And you were in the Wu clan."

I was moved that she remembered something that happened so long ago.

"Since that day, we didn't spend an entire day in the Fa house... No, I needed to go into the forest before that too. Ever since we erected the stove outside the house, we didn't stay in the Fa house from morning until night."

"Your memory is incredible! That's over two months ago, right?"

"Yes. It happened on the tenth day after I found you in the woods. Back then, I didn't think of you as someone irreplaceable..."

She touched my head with a smile on her face:

"By the way, when I hunted together with my father, we spent time bonding during the offseason. When did I forget how that felt...?"

"Huh, i-is that so?"

"We have work that we must do. However... That is why we feel so happy about our off days."

"Yes, I agree..."



“Right now, we are facing off against Pyschkurewuss, who is shrouded in mysteries. I hope we can have a good rest on that day.”

After saying that, Ai Fa moved away from me, her eyes sparkling like a girl that befitted her age. But her face remained serious like that of a house head, and she said in a firm voice:

“Well then, Ludo Wu and the others should be here soon. Asuta, work hard and be careful.”

“Yes, same for you, Ai Fa.”

I answered with a warmth rippling in my heart.

And so, we went to follow our own separate schedules early in the morning.

What trials and tribulations awaited us today? With no idea what today might bring, we bode each other farewell like usual.



When we arrived at the Post Station Town, a happy reunion awaited us.

We picked up the pushcart stall from the <Kimyusu’s Tail Inn> and then headed to the marketplace to buy vegetables as usual. Uncle Dora and Tara were there to welcome us with all smiles.

“Uncle Dora! Are you feeling better already!?”

“Oh, sorry for making you worry. Asuta and everyone, long time no see.”

Uncle Dora smiled gleefully.

Seeing him smile as always almost made me cry.

“Hey hey, what’s with that face? My injuries aren’t that severe to make you so worried, right? Didn’t my son tell you that?”



“Yes, but... It’s wonderful that you have recovered. Tara too, I haven’t seen you for a while.”

“Yes!”

Tara’s small face was brimming with a smile.

“It’s great that you are lively. I need the usual orders of vegetables, will that be fine?”

Uncle Dora took out a sack of vegetables bashfully.

Uncle Dora was his usual self, but a large grey cloth was bandaged around his right shoulder. He was attacked by ruffians pretending to be bandits and disguised in the garments of the denizens of Forest’s Edge. Uncle Dora had to rest for three days because of his wounds.

The greenish spots seeping through the bandage was probably some sort of medicine. It had a stinging smell, which was similar to what Vena Wu used when her ankle got hurt.

“Well, too be honest... I’m a little lost for words right now.”

“Didn’t I tell you not to worry, Asuta? It is only natural for there to be outlaws in a prosperous city. We have always been troubled by bandits and kiba all the while.”

“But it’s not often that you see bandits dressed up like denizens of Forest’s Edge, correct? Anyway, I’m relieved to see that you are fine.”

Ludo Wu interjected with a serious face. Uncle Dora smiled at him gently:

“No matter how they are dressed, bandits will be bandits. It is the job of the guards to apprehend them; we don’t need to be concerned with them.”

“But...”

At this moment, the surroundings turned rowdy.

Ludo Wu turned towards the streets immediately.



*Speak of the devil...* Several guards in leather armor and armed with spears approached us.

The guard standing at the front said to me: "Denizen of the Forest's Edge, you are Asuta of the Fa house, right? We have business with you, please come with us to the guard house."

He was short and looked very thin, but he had a pretty tassel hanging on his armor. There were five guards standing behind this short man.

"What exactly do you need from me? I still need to start my work later..."

"It won't take too much of your time. I just want to check something with you."

He was arrogant but not too brave. His gaze towards the hunters of Forest's Edge was obviously filled with fear.

"Hey, what do you want with Asuta? If it's about the bandit incident a few days ago, my son already told them."

Uncle Dora walked towards the guards angrily.

The short leader of the guards frowned after looking at him.

"Who are you? Are you the vegetable seller who was attacked by the bandits? This doesn't concern you so stay out of this."

"If it isn't about the bandits, why are you harassing Asuta's group? If you want to bring them to the guard house, make it clear right from the start."

"It's fine, Uncle Dora, they are looking for me..."

I stopped Uncle Dora hurriedly.

An unfamiliar voice came from beside me.

"That's right, bringing someone to the guard house is as good as treating them as a criminal. What crimes did that guy commit?"

I turned back in surprise, but that wasn't someone that I knew. There were five to ten people gathered around me. The short leader of the guards was starting to turn pale.

"W-Who are you people? This isn't anything dangerous! Didn't I say that I'm just checking a few things!?"

The five guards behind also braced themselves with a panicked face. A dangerous air was slowly spreading in the streets.

"So, what's your business with him?"

"There is no evidence that those bandits are from the Forest's Edge, correct?"

"How suspicious. If you have any reason why he needs to come, say it clearly."

Some of them might have visited the stall. Half of them were southerners, and the other half westerners. However, the southerners all dressed quite similarly, and I didn't see any of my regulars amongst the westerners.

As if they were filling in the gaps between the two tense groups, a bunch of tall cloaked men was starting to gather too. And, of course, they were easterners.

The leader of the guards said with a red face: "What's so suspicious about this!? We are simply performing official duties!"

A young guard who was still somewhat calm walked to his side.

"Captain, this will cause a commotion if this goes on. Our business with him isn't that bothersome in the first place, why don't we settle it on the spot?"

"Ehh, but..."

"It's more prudent than forcing this mob back and bringing Forest's Edge denizens to the guard house. If you don't mind, I can perform this duty in your stead, Captain..."

"Yes! I will leave it to you then, Sir."

The Captain backed off, and a young guard stepped forth as he suppressed a sigh. It seemed the guards had their own troubles too.



“Denizen of Forest's Edge, Asuta of the Fa house. We want to confirm the case of a bandit attacking you on the 31st of the Blue Month.”

“...A bandit attacking us?”

These unexpected words almost made my heart jump out.

The young guard nodded: “That’s right.”

“The residents in the area made a report to the guard house. On the 31st of the Blue Month, when your group was passing through the residential area, a bandit wearing a cape attacked you with his blade drawn. The figure of the bandit was short, like that of a woman or a child, and had fiery red hair. Is there anything that didn’t match?”

The incident with Geta seemed to have reached the ears of the guards.

I clenched my fist and nodded: “...No.”

I could neither make testimonies against Geta nor commit a crime by stating false facts.

“Why didn’t you make a report that day? Leaving the bandit be means putting the other citizens in danger.”

“I’m very sorry. He seemed to be only interested in denizens of Forest's Edge, so he shouldn’t be a danger to others.”

I answered Sangjura in the same way last time.

And so, the guard responded in the same way as Sangjura:

“That isn’t a reason to hide this crime. If you leave him be, you might encounter the same thing again.”

“That’s right, but he has a good reason for hating the denizens of Forest's Edge, so we hope to resolve this by talking it out. If he is thrown into jail before that, we won’t be able to overcome our differences...”

The guard made a serious expression without saying anything.

The crowd looked at us with doubts and worry.

“...That’s your own problem. Brandishing a blade in town is already a crime, and not reporting this is as good as turning a blind eye to this violation and ignoring the laws in Genos.”

“Yes, I think we acted too rashly. However... He is just watching us from afar. He only retaliated because we pursued him; he wouldn’t have drawn his blade otherwise.”

“Deciding the seriousness of a crime is the job of the town guards and law officer. You are just a plebeian and have no right to pardon a criminal.”

It was our turn to be dumbstruck.

Uncle Dora said: “Hey, what is this...”

But he was cut off mid-sentence by the guards who looked even more displeased:

“We are not here to punish you for your crimes. But if you do it again, we won’t let you off. You all are denizens of Forest's Edge and also proper citizens of Genos, westerners. As the follower of the west god Selva, you have the obligation to follow the law and the right to be protected by the legal system. Don’t ever forget that.”

I nodded cautiously.

Uncle Dora and the crowd seemed surprised by the guards... But Ludo Wu and the others listened to the guards with cautious and narrowed eyes.

“Was there anything special about the bandit’s dressing? If you remember the finer details, we can put up wanted posters.”

“I’m very sorry, but I can’t remember that clearly... His messy hair was covering his face, so I didn’t get a good look.”

I decided to make a little false testimony for this part.

The young guard glared at me doubtfully and then shook his head: “Forget it. Anyway,



red hair is a rare sight amongst westerners. And having a child-like figure is enough to put up a wanted poster. Was he wearing a cape made of hide?"

"Yes, but the color isn't that common in Genos."

"Aside from hunters, not many people wear capes made from hide. However... Hey, vegetable seller."

He said with a glare at Uncle Dora:

"Were the bandits who attacked you really wearing kiba capes? The bandit who attacked these guys seemed to be wearing a cape with a lighter color and thinner patterns."

"It was too dark for me to see. However... I'm very sure that they were wearing accessories made from kiba tusks on their necks."

Uncle Dora looked displeased and reluctant at the same time.

"But, as I said, the denizens of Forest's Edge won't commit banditry..."

"I know, don't keep droning on about it so loudly."

The guard waved his hand impatiently and then said in a louder voice:

"It's a good chance, so let me tell you. Last night, bandits dressed like Forest's Edge denizens attacked the barn of another farm."

"What!"

I couldn't help screaming.

I thought today would be as peaceful as yesterday, but a disaster happened somewhere else.

"There were three of them; their faces were covered with clothes, and they were wearing kiba capes. We still don't know who they are, but they are definitely the same gang as the group that attacked the farm four days ago."

The crowd turned rowdy too. Not just the tens of people who gathered in the beginning, there was a large group of bystanders too.

The young guard raised his voice so all them could hear:

“Since that incident four days ago, we increased the town guards’ night patrol. However, innocent citizens are still attacked, and precious provisions robbed. This is a serious issue. And... It’s committed by bandits wearing the garbs from Forest's Edge...”

“Hey, guard, but they are...”

The young guard said in a strong tone: “Silence. If they were denizens of Forest's Edge, they would have hidden their capes and accessories if they wanted to conceal their identities. But they didn’t do so, and just covered their faces, which is very suspicious. So we suspect this is the work of outlaws disguising themselves as denizens of Forest's Edge.”

A murmur came from the crowd: “Ohhh...”

“And, of course, the truth won’t be uncovered unless we bring the bandits to task. Please don’t be tricked by rumors. We won’t permit any commotions that involve the denizens of Forest's Edge. Please do not slander the denizens of Forest's Edge without any evidence... This is the message from the captain of the towns guard, Sir Shileru.”

These words sounded off the wariness in my heart.

Pyschkurewuss’ brother who was the captain of the town guards said something that sided with the denizens of Forest's Edge... I wasn’t that naive to believe these words.

The young guard surveyed the mob a little arrogantly. He seemed very pleased about being fair and magnanimous towards the fringe group in the Forest's Edge.

He might actually think so, but I was apprehensive of what the captain of the town guards really thought. I started making wild guesses.

*What is he scheming this time...?*

The crowd listened to the guard with doubtful faces. There were some who looked



relieved and others who left after clicking their tongues.

I started feeling down upon seeing unfriendly reactions towards the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Was this Pyschkurewuss' aim?

Giving the denizens of Forest's Edge preferential treatment and sowing mistrust in the townsfolk... Was this the goal of the bandit's sloppy disguises?

*It's fine if I'm overthinking it, but...*

If it was as Ai Fa suspected and Pyschkurewuss was trying to frame Kamyua Yost and the three hunters accompanying him, what should we do? What if they got accused of siding with the denizens of Forest's Edge in an unjust manner?

The suspicion that the denizens of Forest's Edge won't get punished for their crimes would get seeded into the hearts of the townsfolk again. Uncle Dora and those who knew us should be fine, but the denizens of Forest's Edge might lose the trust of the townsfolk listening to the guards in relief— the people who took our side out of a sense of justice.

But, how would this benefit Pyschkurewuss?

I still couldn't figure that out.

I realized a possibility after speaking with Yamiel Lei two days ago.

The hypothesis was that Pyschkurewuss wanted to reinstall the Tsun clan as the tribal clan in order to get a better control over the Forest's Edge.

If this hypothesis was true... then what Pyschkurewuss wanted was for the denizens of Forest's Edge to endure poverty without being understood by any outsiders and keep the status quo of hunting kiba madly in order to survive. In that case, there would be a big significance in cutting the ties between the Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town.

*...I hope this is just my delusion.*

If Pyschkurewuss wasn't someone who could come up with such insidious schemes, that would be a good thing. I was just considering the worst case scenario to avoid being caught off guard. I intended to share with Zashuma and Donda Wu how delusional I was.

We had to win this battle.

## 2

And so, we started the day's work a little later than usual.

First, we opened the stall like we always did.

The roster today were Leina Wu, Shela Wu, and Lala Wu. Unfortunately, Mama Mia Lei had yet to permit Rimee Wu to join the lineup.

It wasn't that dangerous since there were guards, but Mia Lei wanted to continue observing before the next meeting, scheduled for the 15th of the White Month. I wasn't sure how big a factor was Donda Wu's doting of his youngest daughter.

"Hehe. I feel a little sorry for Rimee, but we can work as much as we want now!"

The one who said that was Lala Wu, of course.

She seemed reluctant to give up her work in the Post Station Town to her younger sister. I was very moved by the passion everyone felt towards this work.

"But Tara wants to meet Rimee too. I hope Rimee can work soon."

When she heard what I said, Lala Wu scowled her face.

"Are you saying that you prefer Rimee? I'm on great terms with that Tara kid too."

"I know, but you should care for her as an older sister."

"Don't talk to me like a child! I'm not bullying Rimee or anything!"

Lala Wu puffed her cheeks.

Ludo Wu added oil to the fire.

“Ah, you just don’t want to hand over the work to Rimee when Shin Wu is around, right? We probably won’t withdraw the guards before the meeting...”

“That’s absolutely not true! Not at all! I didn’t say that...!”

Lala Wu swung her fist with all her might, and Ludo Wu stepped back to evade. What a peaceful interaction between siblings.

Zashuma had already made his periodical visit earlier, and the dangerous topics were already covered back then.

Zashuma told me: “He wants to sculpt the idea that the denizens of Forest’s Edge are innocent and then destroy it, huh? What a complicated hypothesis...”

“But Pyschkurewuss might have thought of that. I have never seen him before, but he is a cunning old man, right?”

“I have never seen him before either. I just think of him as a bad guy from a conspiracy drama.”

“Fufu. Not just your cooking is good, you are quick-witted too; that’s good.”

Zashuma smiled coldly as he stroked his suntanned cheeks.

“We have to be very careful. Actually... There is an important meeting in the castle.”

“What, an important meeting?”

“Yes, that’s right. From today until the 9th of the White Month, the nobles in charge of the governance of Genos will need to attend it for these five days in the castle. During this period, neither Pyschkurewuss nor his brother will be free, and we will have very limited contact with Malfreed.”

“I see. So we must exercise extra caution.”

“Yes, it’s more prudent to be careful than be relaxed. Originally... there shouldn’t be



too many schemes from their side.”

Zashuma shrugged his broad shoulders as he said that.

“The ideal case would be the ‘Northern Whirlwind’ coming back, which will save us a lot of trouble. But to date, we don’t have any communication from him.”

“I understand. If I’m not wrong, Kamyua’s group is facing the most danger... So I’m still a little worried.”

“Yes, but it’s quite silly to worry about those guys. The ‘Northern Whirlwind’ and three hunters of the Forest's Edge, even if they get surrounded by the entire town guard, can break out easily. However... Doing that might lead to them being branded as rebels.”

If that was true, it would be a repeat of the “Red Beard Gang” subjugation that happened a decade ago.

Since Malfreed was watching, it shouldn’t be possible to repeat the scheme so openly. However, Pyschkurewuss was behind it. There was no telling what insidious thing he would do if push came to shove.

“Anyway, we just have to be more careful before the return of the ‘Northern Whirlwind’ and his group. You won’t be in much danger since the hunters of Forest's Edge will protect you, but don’t let your guard down.”

Zashuma turned and left after saying that.

*Both Pyschkurewuss and Malfreed won’t be free for the next five days. That is kind of dangerous.*

Since we already thought of the worst case scenario, we needed to be extra careful during this period. And the guards were acting weird early in the morning too.

I thought about all that while working hard at the stall, and Yumi, whom I hadn’t seen for a long time, appeared.

“Heya! Sorry for not visiting you more often.”

“It’s fine, I can only stay until noon because of my work anyway... What does your

father think?"

"That rock brain has finally made up his mind!"

Yumi leaned in with a smile. She wanted to sell kiba cooking at her inn too, but the innkeeper, which was her father, objected vehemently, so she had been trying to convince her father.

"Can you come over to my inn either today or tomorrow? He wants to have a talk with Asuta!"

"Is that so? Yumi, you did great."

Yumi waved her hands when she heard that: "I didn't do anything..."

"I only ate Asuta's delicious cooking every night and told my Dad my impression! What a blissful five days!"

"I'm happy to hear you say that. But... Have you heard about the attacks on the farms?"

I also told her how Milano Mast's daughter almost got abducted. Yumi, who was listening with a smile, slowly turned gloomy.

"Oh... A lot happened these few days. The daughter from the <Kimyusu's Tail Inn>... That ditzy girl, huh. That child can't really handle violent people."

"Yes. To be honest, I'm worried that this might bring trouble to Yumi's inn..."

"What are you saying!? This sort of thing is always happening."

Yumi smiled as she crossed her arms under her breasts, which housed a strong and confident heart. She then tilted her head back a little and looked at me sideways. A cocky smile appeared on her lips and she raised her eyebrows a little contemptuously. She had the expression of a delinquent similar to my first meeting with her.

"By the way, I never mentioned it, but my customers aren't as well-behaved as the patrons of the <Kimyusu's Tail Inn>. Ruffians often visit, and fights aren't an uncommon occurrence. Being harassed by punks is normal at my inn."

“Ah, is that so?”

“That’s right. Yesterday, I even splashed fruit wine on a drunkard trying to cop a feel of my ass. With so many ruffians in the Post Station Town, people will walk all over us if I can’t even do this much.”

She turned to the side with a cold smile. It felt like time had turned back to one month ago.

“So, don’t worry. But if Asuta can only cooperate with proper inns, we will have to call this off.”

“N-No, that’s not true. I will feel at ease if Yumi’s inn can defend yourself from the harassment of ruffians.”

“...Is that what you really think?”

“Huh? Yes, it’s true.”

“You are not regretting being acquainted with a girl like me?”

“Definitely not.”

“I see... That’s great.”

Yumi put her hand on her smooth forehead in relief.

She then looked up with her usual expression of a kind and hardworking girl:





“I already exposed myself to Asuta right from the start. I’m the kind of girl who doesn’t hold back against men and had had more than a couple of run-ins with the guards... To Asuta, I’m probably not that different from the delinquents in this town, correct?”

“Not really. I’m just surprised since I haven’t seen you like this for quite some time. That’s another side of your true self too.”

I answered her.

Yumi made an ambiguous grunt and flicked her long hair.

“That’s right, I’m not trying to deny either side; both are my true self. I’m always cheerful in front of Asuta, so I thought you will hate me if I act this way... Is it really fine?”

“It’s fine, but I will feel more at ease if you are cheerful.”

“Hmmp! Asuta is also acting so gently, even though you are a denizen of Forest's Edge!”

She shouted with a glare. She looked bashful and seem really cute.

“So, are you coming? Either today or tomorrow will be fine, come visit the <West Wind Inn>.”

“Well, there’s more work to do today, so tomorrow then.”

“Okay, tomorrow then. Ah... My Dad looks like a ruffian, so don’t be surprised.”

“Uwah... Is that so? Thank you for the heads up.”

Yumi smiled brilliantly.

“I will head back then. I will be buying my mother’s share too, so two portions.”

She then headed home with two [Myam-roasted meat].

Lala Wu who didn’t say anything tugged my sleeves with a: “Hey.”

“Is it fine for you to expand your business so fast? Including the Kimyusu something

inn, that will be four inns catering your food, right?”

“Yes. I should be able to handle it.”

Three and a half hours of my afternoon’s work were booked. I spent an hour each in the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> and <Big Tree of the South Inn>, and the rest was spent teaching Milano Mast to cook.

If I took on the work for the <Kimyusu’s Tail Inn> and <West Wind Inn>, my schedule would be very tight. But this could be improved without too much difficulty. My goal was to prepare the food at home and shorten the cooking time at the inn.

I already delegated the work of preparing the [Kiba burgers] to Leina Wu and the others, so I had quite a bit of time to finish my work at home. Once I finish researching a new dish, I could spend my time on preparation work.

But before that, I still needed to come up with a karon dish for the <Kimyusu’s Tail Inn> that could rival the kiba dishes, and convince the innkeeper of the <West Wind Inn> that loathed the Forest’s Edge and kiba. These were the two most troubling matters on my mind.

And also that issue with Pyschkurewuss. Despite what Yumi said, I wasn’t keen on expanding my business before the meeting ten days later concluded.

*I wonder what ploy he will use to belittle the denizens of Forest’s Edge. At times like this, we need to figure out the situation carefully.*

This could be a battle between us, who were trying to build a cordial relationship with the Post Station Town, and Pyschkurewuss, who wanted to destroy all that. I couldn’t be sure, but we had to build as solid a foundation as possible.

“Asuta, sorry for making you wait.”

I snapped out of my thoughts when someone suddenly called me.

Rii Sudora and a young escort from the Lutim house were standing beside the stall.

“Huh? It’s already noon?”



“Yes. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, it just seemed that the time skipped to noon in a blink of an eye.”

Yumi who I had not seen for a while visited today too. But some customers I wanted to speak with still hadn’t shown up.

Dell said she wouldn’t be able to visit for the time being so it couldn’t be helped. But I didn’t see Michael and Sangjura either, which was a pity. I was hoping to learn about this world’s charcoal making from Michael, who worked in a charcoal shop.

*Never mind, there’s always tomorrow. But... Where’s Sangjura?*

Sangjura should be fine, but he didn’t visit these few days, so I felt a little lonely.

*Has the wound on his right arm finally recovered, and he started working again? That’s a cheerful thought... But he’s a wanderer. He did say that he wanted to visit Forest’s Edge, but I will feel lonely if he suddenly leaves Genos.*

I started thinking wildly. I must have been mixing Sangjura and Shumimaru in my mind.

Shumimaru had silver hair, while Sangjura had brown; both were uncommon hair colors for easterners. Other than that, there weren’t any other similarities between them. But even so, I still liked the friendly and courteous Sangjura.

*Are Shumimaru’s caravan and Pops Balan’s company doing well...?*

I thought as I headed towards the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> with Leina Wu and the others.

The escort duties were handled by four people as usual. The stall was watched by the young hunters from house Lutim, while Ludo Wu, Shin Wu, and two branch house men I wasn’t familiar with accompanied me.

“Well, let me ask again, Vegeta won’t attack us again, right?”

Ludo Wu asked me as he watched the surroundings warily.

“Yes, at least, that’s what Ai Fa and I think.”

“Ku, then it’s back to being on guard without a clear enemy. It will be great if nothing happens, but it’s hard to feel motivated.”

Ludo Wu grumbled as he kept his eyes sharp.

The truth was, keeping guards for several hours without knowing what to look out for was an exhausting task.

The Wu clan and their kin would rest during their hunt offseason for half a month. Ludo Wu and the others spent almost all that time on guard duties. I sincerely hoped that Ludo Wu and the other guards could have a good rest for my two off days that would start the day after tomorrow.

“Okay. Shin Wu, I will leave the interior to you.”

And so, we reached the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> safely. Ludo Wu and the two youths waited outside, while Leina Wu and I walked through the door opened by Shin Wu.

“Asuta, I have been waiting.”

The innkeeper Neil welcomed us expressionlessly as usual. There weren’t any customers in the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> today; it was very quiet.

Speaking of which, ever since I accepted the job in the <Cryptic Venerable Inn>, aside from Michael three days ago, I had never seen any other customers.

“At this time, the customers are either out for lunch or at work. If not, I wouldn’t be watching the inn by myself.”

“Oh, I see. All the inns are probably empty now.”

The <Cryptic Venerable Inn> was the smallest inn I knew, so it felt even quieter.

“However, there are two guests who stayed behind on the second floor today. They had serious expressions and must be discussing something important.”

“Is that so. Erm... Are they ruffians?”

“No. One of them is a westerner in rather lavish clothing, while the other is an easterner with a warm attitude and a long-term client. Don’t worry, I have always been careful, so be at ease...”

I felt sorry for inconveniencing the patrons of the inn. Especially Neil who engaged the denizens of Forest's Edge eagerly, I felt more and more apologetic towards him.

“Ah, this is the meat for today.”

“Thank you very much.”

The loin meat I put in a sack together with Pico leaves weighed about 2.5 kg. Neil handed me the money on receipt of the goods and transferred the meat into jars filled with salt.

“By the way, as agreed, today would be 50 portions of meat; will that be fine?”

I asked as I prepared the dishes, and Neil shook his head with a “Yes.”

“I’m very sorry, but I want to amend the quantity. Apologies for the sudden request, but can you increase it to 70 portions?”

“Seventy? That’s quite a lot.”

“Yes. The simple kiba dish I made is well-received, so I feel that I can sell this quantity during Asuta’s two off days.”

That was wonderful. Recently, the kiba hunting of the neighboring houses of the Fa house had been going well, so securing the meat wouldn’t be a problem.

“Then I will prepare 70 portions for you. I don’t know how to thank you, Neil.”

“I feel the same too. Word of the kiba cooking has spread, and my inn is full during dinner for the past few days.”

Neil twitched the corner of his mouth a little. He was probably trying to suppress a smile. Neil couldn’t conceal his expression as perfectly as an easterner.



“I need to get help from outsiders during dinner. But even so, I can earn more than sufficient profits. And the thing that makes me the happiest is the customers’ satisfied faces.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I will be in your care after my two off days are over.”

“Same to you.”

At this moment, a deep voice came from outside the kitchen: “Is the innkeeper here?”

I didn’t sense the door being opened, so it must be the guests on the second floor. Neil signaled to us with a look, then turned his head and said: “Yes, I’m here, I’m coming”

“Well then, let’s get to work.”

Leina Wu nodded with a smile: “Okay.”

Shin Wu who was standing by the window moved quickly towards the kitchen door, probably to check if anyone was coming in.

And then... All of a sudden, a tall figure entered the kitchen.

“Be quiet.”

Leina Wu and I froze on the spot, and Shin Wu quickly lowered his stance.

But Shin Wu didn’t do anything else.

Two men entered the kitchen. One of them was grabbing Neil and holding a silver dagger against Neil’s throat.

“...Who are you people?”

Shin Wu asked with an intense fire in his eyes.

“I said... be quiet.”

That man tightened his grip on the dagger. He was pushing the spine of the dagger against the throat, but the edge must be touching the skin too. A faint red line

appeared on Neil's defenseless throat.

However, Neil didn't move at all. He was unconscious for some reason.

"I know you have friends outside. If you make any strange moves, this man is dead."

*Just what is...* I was speechless.

Neil who was just speaking with us was knocked out by villains and held hostage. This was too surreal.

Villains... I could only call them that. The two of them were covered by rags similar to Malfreed, and their faces were concealed.

They were also wearing a very plain cape and tunic. The hood on their head made it hard to discern the colors of their eyes.

But one of them was an easterner. He was tall and skinny, and the gaps of his cloak clearly showed the dark skin tone of his arms and legs. He had a sword on his waist and a dagger in his left hand.

The other person was probably a westerner. He was slightly shorter and fatter than me, and his skin was yellowish brown. The one propping Neil up with a dagger was this westerner.

"If you follow our instructions, we will release that man. No one gets hurt. Are you Asuta of the Fa house...?"

The fat and short man said to me quietly.

At the same time, the tall one kept watching over Shin Wu to keep him in check.

"My employer is extending an invitation to you to be our guest. Come with us. And we will release this man."

"Employer...?"

Did he mean Pyschkurewuss? Aside from him, I couldn't think of anyone else who would do this.

But they could be ruffians who hated the denizens of Forest's Edge, just like that time with Milano Mast's daughter. But attacking the denizens of Forest's Edge so directly... Could they really dismiss such a clear violation of Genos' law?

But I didn't have time to worry about this. I had to calm my flustered heart and answer:

"You want to invite me as a guest? You are asking for too much. Who invites guests with drawn blades!?"

"...Enough talk."

The man said coldly and held his dagger hard.

Neil's blood finally dripped onto the floor.

"Stop! Don't hurt that person!"

As my thinking capability gradually recovered, an uncontrollable rage seeped out.

Just how lawless were these people?

"You think you can avoid the law after doing something like this in the Post Station Town? My comrades are outside, and there are guards patrolling the town too!"

Will the guards let these villains go?

No, no one would dare commit such crimes in broad daylight. Like what the guards in the morning and Michael said, the guards at the grunt level wouldn't follow Pyschkurewuss' orders blindly. And there was also the townsfolk from the Post Station Town here, so the guards wouldn't just ignore the law in Genos.

*But despite all that, these two still attacked us... The hunters in Forest's Edge will retaliate even if there are hostages, correct?*

Shin Wu was 2 m away from those two men. Considering the extraordinary physical prowess of the Forest's Edge hunter, he might be able to do something in this range.

And in terms of agility, Shin Wu was better than Rau Lei. He wasn't at Ai Fa and Ludo

Wu's level, but he was above average for a young hunter.

As I was thinking about that, I glanced at Shin Wu from the corner of my eyes... But Shin Wu's forehead was sweating profusely, and anger brewed in his eyes.

*...It's no good, huh?*

I followed Shin Wu's gaze, which was locked onto the Semu-like man. That man took a stance with his dagger nonchalantly, showing no fear towards Shin Wu's aura as a hunter.

*It seems that... Shin Wu is the one being intimidated...*

But it was impossible for a Forest's Edge hunter to be intimidated by a townsfolk. Even the "Guardian" Zashuma and swordsman Lavis were no match for a hunter of Forest's Edge. Only a handful could rival the prowess of a hunter of Forest's Edge...

The thought of that alone sent a chill down my spine.

*...Could it be...*

I shook my head hard, it wasn't possible.

"Come over here, Asuta of the Fa house. You just need to follow my instructions."

That man sounded a little flustered.

That Semu just stood there silently.

"...Will you really let him go? Right here, right now?"

"Enough talk. Hurry up."

"...Alright."

I prepared to walk forward.

Shin Wu suddenly muttered: "Don't go. Don't go near those people. We can't lose you yet, Asuta."



“Yes... But, I’m sorry. I can’t just abandon Neil.”

I answered as Ai Fa’s figure flashed across my mind.

*Sorry, Ai Fa, I won’t give up until the very end. But this is the only thing I can do...*

I couldn’t let Neil die.

Neil should have seen the faces of the two villains. The main and back doors were guarded by Ludo Wu’s group, so these two must be the two guests upstairs who had disguised themselves.

*Neil’s testimony can convict the two of them. There is still a chance to turn this around.*

And I couldn’t think of any other way than following their instructions. If the two of them could overpower Shin Wu, Neil and even Leina Wu would be in danger.

“Asuta...”

Leina Wu cried out in tears.

I took a deep breath and took another step forward.

Shin Wu wanted to stop me, but the tall man kept him in check with his dagger.

“Good... Grab him.”

The tall man nodded and then grabbed me with his free right hand.

He didn’t use too much strength, but the dagger was immediately pushed against my throat.

“Enough already. Let him go.”

“Hmmp...”

The westerner man unhanded Neil with a grunt.

Neil rolled right onto the floor.

“Don’t make any false moves. My employer just wanted to invite you as a guest. If you follow our instructions obediently, you can return to your usual life tomorrow.”

His words weren’t convincing at all, given the dagger he had on my throat.

Raging fire burst out of Shin Wu’s narrow eyes, and he roared:

“I will never forgive you, villains... If you harm even a finger on Asuta, I will bring my wrath on you even if it cost me my life.”

The villain didn’t answer.

And the short and fat man reached inside his shirt and took out a cloth with a stinging smell.

“Don’t move.”

He said while shoving that cloth onto my nose.

It was damp, and a familiar sweet scent pierced through my nostrils right into my brain.

*Meremere leaves...?*

That nightmarish scene that happened in the Tsun clan village appeared in my mind. But that quickly turned into mist alongside my consciousness. The last thing I heard... was the voice of the villain holding onto me.

A voice, similar to Sangjura’s, came from the villain: “Asuta, you won’t be in any danger. Please, for my employer, show your talent.”

### 3

I had a dream.

In that dream, Ai Fa was crying.

Ai Fa was very angry.

Ai Fa was smiling.

Ai Fa made all sorts of expression and then disappeared. It was a chaotic, heart-wrenching and blissful dream.

I saw Ai Fa's tearful eyes.

Ai Fa glaring at me with icy eyes.

Ai Fa looking at me with her warm gaze.

*Stay by my side forever.*

When did this happen?

Ai Fa held me tightly in the dark.

*I promise to accompany you for the rest of my life.*

I will make that promise as many times as she wished.

*If Ai Fa permits it... and she doesn't reject me, I intend to stay by Ai Fa's side forever.*

*Only death can part me from Ai Fa.*

*I promise to be with Ai Fa until the god or fate, or the devil sends me back to the sea of flame at their whim.*

*...I don't want to lose anyone again...*

That day, I lost everything.

Because of my carelessness, I lost my father, my childhood friend Reina, and the previous life I made together with them.

I definitely couldn't take such despair again.

*So, Ai Fa...*

*Please, don't let go...*

I wandered in a daze inside the void and wrapped my arms around Ai Fa's body.

But Ai Fa turned into mist in my arms and disappeared...

And then, I woke up.



"Huh...?"

When I came to, I was lying down with my hands around myself.

The clear dream I had, quickly slipped away from my memory, leaving only a vague sense of loneliness.

Just what was I doing here?

There was a white mist in my mind, as well as my restless emotions and thoughts.

What time was it...? Where was I?

My blurred vision slowly got into focus.

The first time I saw was an unfamiliar concrete ceiling.

I was lying on a bed.

The soft blanket was really comfortable.

"Bedding... Bedding?"

I sat up with a start. A sense of vertigo assaulted me, and I fell backwards again.

This was a bed, and a soft blanket was covering me. And it wasn't the thick bedding

found in the Forest's Edge, but a type that wrapped me up completely. It was a high-class bedding with a dreamy texture.

Fear ebbed away at my heart.

My mind thought it was impossible, but my heart was filled with doubts. Was I transported to another unfamiliar world?

I wiped the cold sweat on my brow and surveyed the area. As I suspected, I had never seen such a room before. The walls were built with white bricks with a tint of yellow, and there was a closed door to my right.

Tall screens blocked my visions on the other three sides, but, judging from the ceiling, this room was about 10 m<sup>2</sup>. Beside the bed was a small table with a vase on top and a chair. This room didn't have any other furniture.

However, the table and the bed I was lying on had intrinsic carvings and looked luxurious. The soft bedding was probably filled with feathers or something, and the outside wasn't normal cloth either, but a material similar to silk.

The picture of some sort of bird was sewn onto the blue background of the screen with threads of multiple colors. It was as vibrant as a peacock or a phoenix, with small teeth on its beak. It was a creature between a bird and a reptile. I didn't know what it was, but the colorful sewing was eye-catching and well made.

There was a furry carpet on the floor. Should I call this Persian or Turkish style? The rug had a complicated pattern and struck a strange balance between plain and gaudiness.

An extravagant room.

At least, it wasn't similar to a prison.

However... I didn't know of any room that had such a style.

"Just where am I..."

This brick room was completely different from my homeworld, the Forest's Edge settlement, and the Genos Post Station Town. My unease started ballooning. I closed



my eyes and knocked my dizzy head gently with my fist, and then braced myself to stand up.

At this moment, I heard a voice.

“Ara... Are you awake...?”

My heart skipped a beat.

I looked in the direction of the voice and saw someone appearing from behind the screen on my pillow side.

“I’m very sorry for noticing so late... How are you feeling...?”

The voice was slow and a little lazy, and I thought it belonged to Vena Wu. But she wasn’t Vena Wu, of course. This woman was taller than Vena Wu, and her face was more proportionate too. Her skin was porcelain white, even paler than Jaguar people. Her beautiful hair was a honey-like blonde, curvy and reaching her waist. Her pupils were purple, a similar shade to amethyst. This was the first time I saw someone other than Kamyua Yost possess such eyes.

“My name is Chiffon Chel, I’m responsible for caring for you... You must be Asuta-sama of the Fa house, correct...?”

*Asuta of the Fa house...*

So I was still in the world where I was addressed as such, huh.

I placed my hands on the soft bedding and relaxed my entire body.

However, I couldn’t let down my guard yet. I was abducted by unforgivable villains after all.

My confusion right now was probably a side effect of the strange medicine that drugged me. It should be the essence extracted from the Meremere grass that had sedative effects.

I thought with my dazed mind about Ai Fa, Shin Wu, and Ludo Wu, and grit my teeth. I couldn’t give in to despair. This was enemy grounds.

“Are you alright...? If you feel unwell, you should rest a little...”

“No need, I’m fine.”

I turned towards the person named Chiffon Chel again.

She was a beautiful woman. There was a depth to her looks, like that of a Nordic. The lines around her jaw were gentle, making her look graceful.

She was tall too, probably taller than me. On her feminine thicc body was a loose white dress.

There were many decorations on her hair, limbs, and chest, and her blonde hair matched well with her white skin, making her look like the goddess of Greek mythology.

How old was she? She was tall and had a calm air about her, and her expression felt innocent too.

“Erm, where am I? Is this... the Genos city?”

She addressed me as Asuta of the Fa house. After seeing this room, I could only ask that.

The heart of the Genos city was surrounded by sturdy walls... Only the nobles and those acknowledged by the nobles could enter the Genos city.

Chiffon Chel covered her mouth and giggled.

“Hmm... No one told you yet, Asuta-sama...? But I’m very sorry... I can’t speak too much...”

“Then, please get someone who knows the situation to come over. I was brought here forcefully at knifepoint.”

“Is that so... Let me bring you downstairs...”

Chiffon Chel walked to my side gracefully.

I braced myself unconsciously, but she stopped by the table instead of the bed.

Her fingers, which were like small white fishes, picked up a silver object from behind the vase. It looked like a bell with intrinsic carvings on it.

A clear ringing sound rang out, and the door was opened from the outside.

“Asuta-sama of the Fa house has woken up... I want to bring him downstairs...”

There were two guards outside the door.

They were neither fat nor skinny and had yellowish brown skin, so they were probably westerners. They wore decorative armor that seemed impractical for guards and had long thin swords hanging on their waist. Anyway, they didn't seem to be the villains who abducted me.

*Sangjura... Was that Sangjura?*

I couldn't tell if the voice I heard when my consciousness was fading was reality or a dream. But that villain had dark skin, slender build and the prowess to suppress Shin Wu, and... He was holding a dagger with his left hand. Sangjura's right arm was injured.

*But, why would Sangjura do that? Is he someone who will do something so shady?*

The answer was still shrouded in darkness.

But this ploy wouldn't work without knowledge of the relationship between Neil and me. Holding Neil, who was just a businessman, hostage, in order to get me to comply with them. Only someone who knew about my relationship with Neil could do that.

However, Sangjura was a regular at my stall and was lodging in the <Cryptic Venerable Inn>. In that case, he could easily get hold of the fact that Neil was close to the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The more I thought about it, the more painful my heart felt. I was far away from my friends in Forest's Edge and my precious Santoku knife, abducted by villains with just the clothes on me. I might have been betrayed by someone I treated as a friend.

“Well then, let's go...”

Chiffon Chel walked to the guards gracefully.

I suppressed the worries in my heart and followed. There was a corridor outside the door; it was still a brick-like building with carpeted floors. The ceiling was tall, but the passageway wasn't that wide. There were only small windows to let in light, so the place seemed a little dim.

With the guards sandwiching us from the front and the back, we walked for about ten meters before reaching a stone spiral stairwell.

There was another corridor downstairs. The structure felt really secluded.

"This way, please..."

We finally reached a large door.

One of the guards pushed the door open quietly, and I felt a warmth enter my body.

*What's with this room?*

There wasn't any furniture here, and it looked like a real prison cell. The stone flooring was completely exposed.

But there was a large door right before us, so this was probably a waiting room of sorts.

*...Is the one who behind this retarded ploy in there?*

Aside from Pyschkurewuss, I couldn't think of anybody else doing this. However, I heard that the nobles had gathered in the castle for a governance conference from today onwards. I didn't think this was the heart of the Genos city... But what was the truth?

"Please..."

Chiffon Chel walked forth fearlessly.

The soldiers stopped and stood on either side of the door.

Chiffon Chel opened the door... and a strange warmth assaulted me like a flood from a broken dam.

I yelped out “Uwah...”, and cold fingers grabbed my wrist.

“Q-Quickly... The warm air is getting out...”

“W-What’s with this room?”

The doors behind me shut tightly. White vapor covered the room. I couldn’t see how large the room was as the mist was too thick.

And I could also smell the fragrance of plants. It was different from lilo, Pico leaves, and Meremere grass, and was similar to mugworts. I didn’t find the aroma offensive, but I still kept my guard up.

“...What’s wrong...?”

Chiffon Chel smiled at me through the white mist. She reached behind her, and her white dress slipped down to her feet. Her body that was whiter than the mist was unveiled completely to me.

“W-What are you doing!?”

“What are you saying... I have been instructed to tend to Asuta-sama’s dressing...”

She said as she removed the accessories from her limbs. She had something like a loincloth around her waist.

She was otherwise naked. If not for the thick mist, I would be 50% more confused.

“Here, please remove your clothes, Asuta-sama...”

Two pale arms reached for me like a pair of snakes.

I pressed my back onto the tightly shut door with a “Uwah!”

“T-Tend to my dressing, could this be... a bathhouse!?”



“Bathhouse...? This is a bath hall...”

My guess was correct. I heard that before the Edo period, steam baths were more popular than bathing in bathtubs. But even with this answer, I still felt uneasy.

“Anyway, you will need to cleanse your body... Come, put your clothes here...”

“I know this is a bath hall! I will clean my body as you wish! But I don’t need you to help!”

“Ara... But if I don’t do my job, I will get lashings...”

“Job? This is your job!?”

“Yes... Serving the guests is the meaning of my existence that has been bestowed to me...”

Chiffon Chel smiled as she drew near. She was about 5 cm taller than me.

“I’m very good at scrubbing, so, please, be at ease...”

Her fingers that were elegant like white fishes reached inside my T-shirt.

“Ara, Asuta-sama has skin as smooth as a lady... This is worthy of a scrub...”

I screamed for help from my very soul.

Aside from disturbing the mist in the bath hall, it was of no help at all.



About twenty minutes later.

The dirt on my body and my dignity as a person were washed from me, and I waited depressedly in the guard’s waiting room.

“...Are you still feeling unwell...?”

Chiffon Chel looked at me worriedly. I wanted to tell her that I was alright, but I couldn't say so clearly.

I was wearing the new clothes prepared for me in the bath hall. A beige-colored sleeveless shirt and loose pants, I was dressed in white all over, and only my leather shoes were brown.

"Let's go... The sun is almost setting..."

"Ah, wait. Where are my clothes?"

The clothes I was wearing were bundled together and placed inside a weave basket.

"Well... If you don't mind, I can help you dispose of them..."

"That won't do. These clothes are important to me."

I took out my horns and tusks necklace from the basket and put it around my neck.

"Please keep the rest of the clothing too. I want to wear them when I go back."

I said with all my strength, and Chiffon Chel smiled cheerfully.

"I understand... I will serve you again when that time comes..."

I stood up and said loudly: "You don't need to worry about that!"

"Alright then, let's be off..."

After meeting up with the guards, we continued down the corridor. We ignored the stairwell and continued onwards. After turning a few corners, we still didn't enter any open space. This building felt very secluded, like a maze.

"This way..."

Chiffon Chel stopped before another door.

I would finally be coming face to face with the one responsible for all this.

Abduction at knifepoint and forced cleansing before meeting them; all these were retarded things only a noble would do. I needed to prioritize my safe return to the Post Station Town, but I wasn't sure if I could suppress the urge of disgust in my heart.

However, I couldn't act rashly. I had to make it through and return to Ai Fa's side.

I thought as I entered the door but was caught off guard. I should have predicted this development. What awaited me wasn't the room of an arrogant noble, but a place I was familiar with... a kitchen.

"Over here, please... This is the workplace of Asuta-sama..."

Since they caught a chef like me, their goal was to make me cook. Speaking of which, the villain who was probably Sangjura did say "Please, for my employer, show your talent." But, would someone do something so retarded as making me cook without explaining the situation?

"What is going on here? Please explain in detail."

The guards stayed outside, showing no intentions of coming in. So the one who answered me with a smile was Chiffon Chel.

"My employer wants to eat Asuta's cooking... Please ask Roy-sama for the details..."

"Roy? Who's that?"

"It's a chef from this mansion who will help Asuta... Roy-sama, are you here...?"

Chiffon Chel raised her voice a little, and a gruff voice came from the half-opened door inside the kitchen: "Shut up."

"So you are finally here, huh. I still have work to do, this is such a pain."

At the same time, a young man appeared.

He was a westerner youth around twenty years old. He had a simple cylindrical hat on his head and white clothes like me. He looked just like a chef.

Under his hat were brown hair and an ivory-colored face full of freckles. His height

and build were similar to mine, and he didn't look buffed at all.

"Hmmp, so you are the temp staff for today, huh?"

The brown eyes of that youth were filled with suspicion as he checked me out. He had the face of a well-mannered man, but he looked very displeased.

"Forget it, it's fine, hurry up and start working. If I don't settle your work, I can't start with my job either."

"Wait. I was abducted here without being told anything. You want me to start cooking all of a sudden? What kind of joke is this?"

I started to protest, and the youth named Roy turned his head with a sour face towards Chiffon Chel and said:

"Hey, didn't you explain anything to him? I was only told to help him cook."

"I'm very sorry, Roy-sama. Erm... I already told him the content of his work..."

"But you didn't tell me anything at all. As I said, I was brought here at knifepoint."

Chiffon Chel and Roy didn't seem like people who would do something so nefarious, which was why I told them that.

However, Chiffon Chel just smiled politely, while Roy averted his face disinterestedly. They wouldn't do anything bad, but they didn't empathize with my situation either.

"Please allow me to explain... My employer wants to taste Asuta's cooking. And if you satisfy my employer with your cooking... That's what I heard."

"What if I refuse?"

"Then... There might be lashing..."

"Does Genos permit such breaching of the law?"

I replied a little harshly, and Chiffon Chel shook her head lazily: "It's not permitted..."

“I will be the one to get it... My employer will think of this as my mistake...”

“What is this, why will you get whipped?”

After saying this, I received an answer to a doubt I had in my mind.

“You are Chiffon Chel, right? I apologize if I’m mistaken but... Are you from Mahildra?”

Chiffon Chel laughed strangely.

“I can’t say more... but no one can think of being from any other places...”

I sighed; it was just as I thought. People from the enemy Mahildra nation were enslaved in the western kingdom.

In that case, this was definitely Pyschkurewuss’ mansion. The Genos territory was very far from Mahildra, and Pyschkurewuss was the only one buying slaves... Kamyua Yost told me that before.

*There’s a limit to how evil you can be, you bastard.*

I scratched my head that was washed by this girl with a pitiful background and turned to Chiffon Chel:

“So I can go home after making one dish? That’s what the guy who abducted me said.”

“Yes... But you have to do your best for this job... If my employer says your cooking tastes too bad, you will be prohibited from doing business in the Post Station Town...”

“Damn it! Erm... I want to confirm something, is this the mansion of the head of the Turan house, Count Pyschkurewuss?”

No answer.

Chiffon Chel smiled as if she was cajoling a child, while Roy just shrugged.

“I just have to build on this assumption then. Or maybe... this is the castle of Marstein, the landlord of Genos?”



I was answered with a sarcastic snort:

“Genos castle? Are you retarded? I don’t know if you are a denizen of Forest's Edge or from the Post Station Town, but a lowly plebeian like you won’t be permitted in.”

“That’s great then. But Count Turan will be staying in the castle from today onwards, right? I don’t understand why I was brought here.”

“Asuta-sama... I’m very sorry, but I can’t say more...”

“So you are saying that I should cook without knowing who is the one behind this retardedness? And I will be complimented if your employer is pleased, and my stall in the Post Station Town will be destroyed if my dish displeases your employer?”

“No... Regarding your stall in the Post Station Town, I only said that as I wish for the best for Asuta-sama... But if nothing goes wrong, you won’t be punished...”

“But, how much someone likes a cooking is subjective to their own preferences, right?”

“Yes...”

Chiffon Chel tilted her head quizzingly.

“However, my employer just wants to eat delicious food... All this isn’t because of a grudge against Asuta-sama; my employer invited you because of Asuta-sama’s capability... So, you don’t need to worry...”

“So it won’t matter if the dish is delicious or not, and I can go home after making one dish? If it doesn’t taste too bad, you won’t interfere with my business in the Post Station Town?”

“Yes... That’s what I heard...”

“I can rest easy if I can believe your words.”

However, I couldn’t trust people I had never met before, and to top it off, people who resorted to abduction.

But... What kind of situation was this? Pyschkurewuss was a gourmet, but would he

really do something like this while under investigation?

I might be a foreigner, but I called myself a denizen of Forest's Edge and started a business in the Post Station Town. So people might think of me as an eyesore, and gourmet might be curious about my culinary repertoire.

But, why now? Farms were attacked by bandits wearing garbs from the Forest's Edge, Milano Mast met with danger, and the guards suddenly made a show of siding with the denizens of Forest's Edge... Compared to all these ploys, what he did this time was too ludicrous.

No, abducting me to his own mansion in broad daylight was beyond ridiculous. With Neil's and my testimony, we could definitely report this crime. With Malfreed who could match Pyschkurewuss in authority on our side, this matter wouldn't end so easily.

Was Pyschkurewuss so retarded that he would commit such a moronic crime when he was getting heat from an investigation?

Also... If he wanted dinner for one night, he could have just asked the tribal chief of the Forest's Edge, In terms of status, Pyschkurewuss was above us, and, if he permitted guards, Donda Wu and the others wouldn't turn him down.

I was sure that this was Pyschkurewuss' ploy, but something still seemed off.

Roy said to me impatiently: "Well, can't you just hole yourself up in that room? I will have less work to do if you do that."

I considered this carefully as, indeed, this might be the right thing to do.

Michael warned me to not display my culinary skills to Pyschkurewuss. But I couldn't be sure that Pyschkurewuss was behind this absurdity. Should I hole up in this brick room for the five days while Malfreed was busy?

"No, Asuta-sama... I'm not saying this for my own self-interest... But I think this is very dangerous..."

"Dangerous?"

“Yes... My employer’s wishes were fulfilled today, and they became overjoyed... But if Asuta provokes my employer, Asuta might receive a lashing...”

Roy said impatiently: “Hey, if you don’t shut up, you will get a lashing too.”

The unhappiness in my heart started boiling over.

“I get it. In short, I have to cook, right?”

I just had to get it over with.

My life was in the hands of my enemy after all. If I believed that Pyschkurewuss was to lose his standing under the combined efforts of Kamyua Yost’s scheme and hard work of Donda Wu and company, that would be the most appropriate thing to do. Once that happened, it shouldn’t matter whether Pyschkurewuss would get enamored with my dishes or not.

*And... How can I stand not seeing Ai Fa for five days?*

Ai Fa wouldn’t know where I was during these five days. The thought of Ai Fa’s pain and loneliness during this time was heart-wrenching for me.

*I must return home.*

And so, I decided to cook for the nobles in this mansion.

# Chapter 2

## Young Tyrant

### 1

“Well then, I beg your leave...”

Chiffon Chel left the kitchen, leaving me alone with Roy.

“Well, well. It will save me a lot of trouble if you leave too.”

I ignored the grumbling Roy for now and checked out the kitchen.

If there weren't all these troubles, this would be an exciting moment. The owner of this mansion was either a noble or someone of similar standings. Hence, the facilities here were far better than any found in the Forest's Edge and Post Station Town.

It was 6 to 7 m wide and could be divided into two 10 m<sup>2</sup> rooms. The walls and floor were made from bricks, and there were several windows at the top of the walls used for air and lighting. The air circulation was poor though.

On the right wall was a set of culinary tools. Aside from the meat cutting knife and vegetable knife, there were wooden ladles of all sizes, steel grater, and things like strainers. The tools were as varied as in my hometown.

Further in was a small cupboard, with pots and equipment of various sizes in it. I could see a frying pan, a mortar, and an assortment of bowls.

On the opposite side were stoves. There were four stoves of various sizes, all built from stones. The crates beside them were filled with firewood and dark pieces of wood—charcoal. I saw the actual thing before I could ask Michael about them.

Further to the side was a large steel chest. Half of it was embedded in the wall, with a rectangular door in front of it. I opened it curiously and found two layers of steel netting inside. This was definitely an oven.

The working counter in the middle of the room was big too. There were many flasks filled with water too. The empty large jar was probably used for the disposing of kitchen waste; it was clean but still had a faint smell of rotten meat.

What a luxurious place this was. Aside from the lack of gas stove and electricity, this was the best cooking facility I had ever seen. Even in this technologically backward world, it was possible to prepare such facilities.

While I looked in awe, the large gulf between the life of nobles and commoners made me feel complicated.

“You are instructed to make a main dish...”

I could imagine Roy’s cold smile from his tone, and I turned towards him.

“You have to make it with kimyusu meat and karon milk. The food store is this way...”

That was the place where Roy was in before we came. Inside was a scene right out of heaven. The evenly spaced cupboard was filled with vegetables that looked familiar. There were dried fruits and herbs on the wall, and the cupboard on the innermost side was filled with bottles. On the floor was a large pot with a cover, and the pot was probably filled with salted meat. In the basket beside it were two differently sized eggs. They presumably were eggs from the chicken-like kimyusu and the ostrich-like Totos. I seldom saw eggs in the market, because they were only sold in the kimyusu or Totos shops; I was curious about them.

“This is incredible... As expected of a noble’s mansion, everything is top class.”

“Hmmp. This is a kitchen for servants, you know?”

“Servants?”

“This is a small kitchen used to cook for servants. It’s suitable for brats like you though.”

Just as he said, a better environment than this would be wasted on me. So I wasn’t mad even though he showed a mocking face.

“Let’s get started quickly. The bell for the third koku had rung; you won’t make it in

time for dinner if you dally any further.”

<TL: 刻/, means time>

“Third koku... I was abducted a little after high noon, how much time do I have?”

“Dinner is at dusk, on the sixth koku.”

“Oh. Is noon 0 koku? Or the 1st koku?”

“...Noon is noon. When the bell rings 6 times, afternoon has passed; that means the sun has set.”

Roy looked surprised that I didn’t even know that.

*So the period from noon to dusk is divided into six parts. So right now is mid-afternoon.*

Which meant, I would usually be done with my work in the Post Station Town right about now.

What did everyone do after I was abducted? I only realized that now. Were Ludo Wu and the others injured? Was Neil released? Did Leina Wu and the others operate the stall until the end of the day?

I was absent from my work in the inn. What did Neil, Naudiz, and Milano Mast think when they heard I got abducted by villains?

And Ai Fa...

Did someone tell Ai Fa yet?

*I must return to Forest's Edge safely.*

I turned to Roy firmly and said:

“Is this karon milk?”

Roy walked to the cupboard without a word and took out a bottle that was about the size of a fruit wine bottle.



“All the blue bottles are karon milk. There are five left for today.”

I opened the cork-like cover and sniffed. The aroma of milk entered my nostrils.

“It’s fragrant, can it be drank directly?”

“Of course. If left alone until tomorrow, it can only be made into nyuushi and clabber.”

“Nyuushi?”

I had never heard either term before. But an idea sprang up in my heart.

“Is nyuushi the made from the fats in the milk? Or...”

Roy waved his hand impatiently and cut me off, and then took out a small pot from the cupboard. Under the cover was a fragrant and glossy milk white object... This was definitely something like butter.

“Oh! This is amazing! What’s in the other bottles?”

“...This bottle is reten oil, that one is karon fats. Below is mamaria fruit wine, and bubbling wine imported from Jaguar, Gyama kumis from Semu, and vinegar made from mamaria.”

“Vinegar! There’s even vinegar!?”

I couldn’t help shouting while Roy frown impatiently.

“Mamaria vinegar isn’t that uncommon. Don’t shout so suddenly.”

“There’s no vinegar in the Post Station Town. Is reten oil a type of vegetable oil?”

Roy answered by making a ‘do you even need to ask’ face.

Just like how my knowledge was constrained to the Post Station Town, he only knew about the city. That’s why he couldn’t understand why I seemed so shocked by butter, vegetable oil, and vinegar. The anxiety of being separated from my comrades in the Forest’s Edge and the excitement of seeing unknown ingredients mesmerized me.

“This row over here are seasoning procured from Jaguar, Tau sauce, sugar, and banam honey.”

The Jaguar sugar was brown, just like those extracted from sugarcane, and the grains were a little coarse.

Banam honey was a glossy golden liquid that was similar to maple syrup. There were also the familiar rock salt, Pico leaves, lilo, and a few other herbs. There were even dried and crispy gigo.

There were two type of curd, Gyama cheese and karon cheese. The texture of Gyama cheese I was familiar with resembled Camembert cheese. The karon cheese had a milkier taste, felt soft and chewy, and was as white as snow. It was like top quality Mozzarella cheese.

And last of all was the mysterious light yellow powder.

“This is stock powder made by brewing kimyusu meat with bones, karon shoulder meat, and a few other vegetables.”

With permission from Roy, I tasted it a little.

Saltiness and tastiness exploded in my tongue. It was a condensed stock powder that reminded me of the bouillon cube.

“Impressive. How is this powder made from the soup?”

I thought these things couldn’t be made without the technology to freeze dry food, but Roy had a simple answer:

“After brewing the stock, coarser grain of fuwano and salt is sprinkled on it and then left to dry.”

So this was fuwano powder that had absorbed the stock. Fuwano was a wheat-like ingredient that could be bought in the Post Station Town. The staple food of the denizens of Forest's Edge was poitan, so I had only eaten fuwano a handful of times.

“That’s all the seasoning in this kitchen. Chef from the Post Station Town, is there anything you aren’t satisfied with?”

“I don’t have any complaints.”

Milk, butter, vegetable oil, animal oil, vinegar, salt, honey, and bouillon cube... All the seasonings I yearned for were here. It made me wonder why I even worked so hard all this time.

However, this wasn’t my original job. My job was to make a dish with the ingredients and seasoning that could be found in the Post Station Town. I was getting pissed at myself for feeling so excited.

*There is such a great difference between the two sides of the rock wall. The denizens of Forest’s Edge have to hunt kiba to protect the farmlands, the farmers grow crops in the fields, and the people in the Post Station Town and travelers run businesses... But what the people of the city are doing to accumulate so much wealth?*

I was born in Japan and only learned in school about the nobles and royalty ruling over a walled up society. Hence, I didn’t know about the gulf between nobles and citizens.

“So, I have to use karon milk and kimyusu meat, huh. Normally, what sort of dish would be served with these ingredients?”

I suppressed the anxiety in my heart and asked Roy.

“Since there is karon milk, it will either be vegetable stew or soup, or used to grill the meat. It’s impossible to make a decent dish without using more ingredients.”

“That’s true. Hmm... It will be better to make cream stew after all...”

“Cream stew?”

“It’s a dish from my hometown. It will be great if the nobles like it.”

I didn’t know about their preferences, but I could only make dishes I knew.

I decided to try the karon milk and butter.

“Hey, if you are going to taste the milk, shake the bottle.”

“Huh? Why?”

“If you don’t shake it, the water and the fats will be separated...”

I see. Fresh milk that has not been homogenized will separate into water and fats.

I heeded Roy’s advice and shook the bottle before tasting the milk. It was thicker than the cow milk I knew about and tasted more gamey too.

It wasn’t as gamey as I thought, it was probably pasteurized. Anyway, it had a thick texture and probably had more fats than cow milk.

By extracting the fats from the milk, nyuushi could be made. It didn’t look like it had been fermented, and the sweet taste was similar to what I knew.

However, salt had been added, probably to preserve it. It was very salty, and most of the salt had melted into it because of the high room temperature. It probably had a short shelf life.

Anyway, if I could use karon milk and nyuushi to replace cow milk and butter, it wouldn’t be hard to make cream stew. With complicated emotions, I decided to focus on the vegetable selection.

“By the way, how many portions should I make?”

“Four... No, three portions.”

Dinner for three, huh.

Just who might they be?

Speaking of which... Dell was staying in Pyschkurewuss’ mansion, could it be this one? I didn’t think he would abduct someone to his mansion where a guest was lodging, however, I couldn’t be sure of a noble’s thought process.

“Main dishes for three, so one plate each. The quantity isn’t much so I won’t need to trouble you when cooking.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Roy wasn't too unhappy, the corners of his mouth twisted in a smile. Maybe helping me was just an excuse, and his job was to keep watch over me right from the start.

Never mind, there were still two armed guards outside. I went to the vegetable cupboard with a 'keep watch if you want to'. I quickly found aria, chachi, and another vegetable found in the Post Station Town, neenon.

Neenon was an orange colored vegetable that was similar to a turnip. It was sweet and turned very soft after boiling. This was the meshed up vegetable found in the kimyusu meat bun I ate during my first visit to the Post Station Town.

After boiling it adequately, it would have the texture of carrots. When cooking 'Kiba soup' at home, I would add it in.

*It will be perfect if I have some broccoli, but I'm reluctant to try vegetables I'm not familiar with.*

Hence, I decided to add the green tino in. Tino was similar to cabbage, and the color and taste were both strong. It wasn't bad as an ingredient for cream stew.

These vegetables were enough.

However, I couldn't find the key ingredient to increase the viscosity of the stew, poitan.

When I asked Roy, he just said with a sarcastic laugh: "No way."

"It's impossible to make a decent dish with poitan. Are you asking for a lashing?"

Oh right, Kamyua Yost once said that poitan was portable food for travelers and soldiers, and even the people in the Post Station Town wouldn't serve them on the dining table.

I laid out the vegetables onto the working counter and fell into deep thought. A vegetable stew that wasn't thick couldn't be called a vegetable stew.

"Erm... Sorry to bother you, is the staple food in the city fuwano?"

"Do you even need to ask?"

“How is the fuwano processed into this form?”

“Huh? The fuwano is ground and then the water is added. You are a chef, yet you have never baked fuwano before?”

“Yes, because there wasn’t a need for me to bake fuwano in the past. Are there any ground fuwano here?”

Roy gestured to the corner of the food store with his thumb.

Behind the vegetable cupboard was a giant sack. I opened it, and it was filled with white powder.

Poitan was milky white, but this powder was as white as snow. The grains were very fine, and when I put some in my mouth, it tasted just like wheat.

*Hmmm, this will do. By the way... This might be more similar to wheat than poitan.*

With the substitute of milk and butter here, I could start making the white sauce by following the normal procedure. I decided to start from here.

“Please let me borrow the stove.”

I shifted all the food I needed onto the work table and then stood before the stove. I lit a fire in the stove, heated up a small pot and put the nyuushi into the pot. The nyuushi melted immediately, and the butter-like fragrance was appetizing.

I then added a little fuwano powder and spread it to a spatula to avoid it from bunching up. The poitan would get burned easily during this process, as kiba fats were used instead of nyuushi. When making vegetable stew for the house Lutim banquet, I added raw poitan into the pot to give the stew a coerciveness and texture.

The result was... The fuwano powder and karon nyuushi were mixed together.

I added karon milk into the semi-liquid sauce and tried the taste. Both the flavor and texture were thick. It tasted stronger than a sauce made from milk and butter and wasn’t too sticky either.

I didn't add rock salt, Pico leaves, and the bouillon cube-like thing in to season, and made a fuwano sauce that could be served confidently anywhere.

"Your methods are really strange."

Roy said sarcastically, but I ignored him since he didn't ask for a taste test.

*Okay, next are vegetables and meat.*

Aria, chachi, tino, neenon— the substitutes for onion, potato, cabbage, and carrot, respectively. Chachi and tino were chopped into bite-size, the aria was shredded, and neenon— sliced. The quantity wasn't much since it was just dinner for three.

I decided to use kimyusu breast meat. This was the main dish, so I added more meat.

And thankfully, the kimyusu meat in this mansion had skin on them. Kimyusu meat with skin was expensive, but that might just be a trivial amount for nobles.





The meat and vegetable knives here were high quality. It was ironic how good the environment here was.

“Erm, can I use nyuushi to fry meat and vegetables?”

“Huh? Whatever, you are really annoying with your endless questions.”

“Because, nyuushi is expensive, right? A lot of milk is needed to make this small quantity.”

I heard that 1 liter of cow milk could only make 20 g of butter.

But Roy just mocked me.

“That might be so, but using it to make a mediocre dish is better than letting it spoil.”

“Letting it spoil... It will be thrown away?”

“What else can we do? Smear it over your body like the princesses in the capital? Forget it... We can buy more if this isn’t enough, that’s the way the nobles do things.”

What a tasteless way of acting. Karon milk, nyuushi, as well as curd were all ingredients that couldn’t be bought in the Post Station Town. It couldn’t be helped if it was too expensive to buy... But the nobles buying them recklessly was the reason for their inflated cost.

By the way, meat from the karon torso could only be bought in the city.

*How maddening.*

The thought that the cream stew I made would only end up in the mouth of the nobles made me feel empty inside.

*Is there a way to buy karon milk in the Post Station Town? If I can make them into nyuushi and curd myself, I will be able to expand my repertoire greatly with just these two ingredients.*

Gyama curd and oil could be bought from traveling merchants. If I figured out the supply chain and price, I might be able to let karon milk, reten oil, and sugar from Jaguar be sold in the Post Station Town. But I could only think about doing this.

“Hey, if you dally any further, you will really have no time.”

When I heard his joking tone, I turned and looked at Roy.

He was a western youth without any prominent features and could be seen anywhere. He had a sharp tongue, but I didn't think he was a bad guy. However, he didn't seem to understand how great his environment was.

“...Please let me use the stove again.”

Anyway, I had to finish this job that was forced onto me quickly and then think about the Forest's Edge and Post Station Town. But since I met with something so unreasonable, I wouldn't be satisfied if I didn't take some useful information back with me.

I pondered as I used the nyuushi to fry the large slices of kimyusu meat. It had already been marinated in salt, so the only seasoning I used was Pico leaves. When the skin turned yellowish brown, I added in the vegetable. After a while, I added in water and cooked it over a weak flame.

Thirty minutes later, I heard a heavy bell from afar, and the chachi that was the toughest to cook had turned soft.

Since I didn't cook kiba meat and there was a substitute for bouillon cube, it didn't need to be cooked for too long. I stirred it slowly over a weak fire and tested the taste after it had been thoroughly cooked.

It didn't feel salty enough, so I added some rock salt and Tau sauce as a hidden taste.

This was the nostalgic taste of the cream stew. I never imagined that I could make this dish in this world. How blissful it would be if I could let Ai Fa, the denizens of Forest's Edge, and the people in the Post Station Town try this dish. I kept this thought inside my heart and informed Roy that I was done.

“Hmmp. That's fast. Hey... The food is done!”

Roy yelled, and the door opened. Chiffon Chel appeared before us.

“Thank you for your hard work, Asuta-sama, Roy-sama... Ara, there’s the aroma of karon milk...”

Chiffon Chel closed her eyes as if she was mesmerized.

I then scooped up the cream stew with a ladle, followed by handing the plate to Chiffon Chel. She bowed towards me and picked up a spoon.

“Well then, allow me to test for poison...”

So this woman got such a duty.

I looked at her with despair... Chiffon Chel took a bite and then opened her eyes wide: “Ara...”

On her face was a smile of surprise and compliment.

“This... is such a delicious dish... I had never tasted something so good in my life...”

Roy raised his eyebrow.

“Hey, watch it with your flattery, slave girl. Don’t forget who makes the dishes you taste test every day.”

“I didn’t forget, and I’m not demeaning anyone else’s cooking... I just think this is a perfect dish...”

“You don’t seem to get it. The top chefs of Genos are all gathered in this manor. I warn you, if you say anything that implies they are fools, you will get more than a lashing.”

“Ehh... But I’m from Mahildra... My taste sense is different from westerners, so I don’t think I’m demeaning anyone...”

Chiffon Chel said with a reserved smile.

Roy’s face started to turn nasty.

“...So you’re saying you won’t retract your retarded words?”

Chiffon Chel tilted her head troubledly and nodded: “Yes...”

The next instant, Roy threw the ladle beside the pot at Chiffon Chel. The ladle hit her temple, and Chiffon Chel yelled weakly.

“Don’t be retarded, lowly slave!”

Roy grabbed the karon bottle on the working platform, and when he was about to throw the bottle, I grabbed his arm.

“Stop! Don’t use violence over such stupid things!”

Roy looked at me with his bloodshot eyes.

“Unhand me, Post Station Town chef, do you know who I am?”

“Who gives a shit. Aren’t you the one who is hiding your identity?”

Roy started struggling, and I increased my strength.

“However, you are also a chef, right? Then don’t abuse the precious cooking tools and ingredients.”

Roy twisted his face from pain. The blue bottle dropped onto the working platform.

“It hurts! L-Let me go! My arm is breaking!”

I was taken aback and said: “You are exaggerating too much.” I was shocked by the tears flowing from Roy’s eyes. Did it really hurt that much?

“Asuta-sama... Please stop...”

Chiffon Chel who was on the floor grabbed my legs.

I looked back at her and held my breath. The two guards behind her had their hands on their sword hilt.

I let go, and Roy collapsed onto the floor clutching his arm.

“Thank you... But, standing up for someone like me won’t do Asuta-sama any good...”

I sighed deeply upon hearing what Chiffon Chel said.

*I want to go back to Ai Fa and for her to enjoy my cooking.* This thought filled my entire mind.

## 2

From then until the night was a painful time for me.

I couldn’t leave before their employer finished dinner, so I was confined to the room I woke up in.

I finished the dish in less than an hour, so there were still two hours before dinner started at dusk. I didn’t have anything to kill time since I was captured in enemy territory. The only thing I could do was lie in my soft bed and brood.

“Asuta-sama... would you like me to prepare you something to drink...?”

Chiffon Chel leaned out from behind the screens and said quietly.

“No, no need.”

“You don’t need it, huh... There is still some time before dinner, so you don’t need to hold back... It is my job to attend to your needs...”

Chiffon Chel walked over quietly as she said that.

“My only wish is going back home as soon as possible.”

“...Aside from that, I can do everything else to satisfy Asuta-sama...”

The bed started to screech.

I took a look, and Chiffon Chel was already leaning on the bed.

She rested one arm on the bed and bent her slim waist to lean her upper body towards

me. I couldn't help curling my body up with her purple eyes staring at me.

"Then, want to chat a little to pass the time? Let's talk about idle things, aside from the nobles and this manor."

"Ara..."

Chiffon Chel smiled with her hand on her mouth.

"But, I don't know anything outside this manor... I'm not permitted to step outside..."

"But, you were forcefully brought here, right? I still don't really understand the relationship between the west and the north"

I propped myself up and sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed.

It wasn't an exciting topic, but it was better than brooding endlessly.

"By the way, I don't really understand the slavery system in this country. Your movements seem quite unrestricted... Are you really a slave?"

"Yes... I was caught by Selva soldiers when I was young and got brought to Genos... But I learned to speak western faster than anyone else, and was permitted to live in this manor."

"That's cruel. I don't really understand it is though."

"Not really... Genos is very peaceful... probably because it is far away from Mahildra... At the borders, the westerners and northerners loathe each other... But I'm not treated too harshly here..."

I almost mentioned about the ladle thrown at her, but that probably wasn't harsh treatment to her. This was too heavy a topic for someone born in Japan like me.

"The south and east kingdom are still fighting at their national borders, but they can coexist in Genos. Can northerners and westerners coexist in the eastern kingdom?"

"I don't know... How should I put this... My hometown is very far from Semu, so I don't really know either..."



Chiffon Chel didn't empathize with my situation; was it because she didn't show it, or had she lost the emotions to feel sad for others? I didn't know that, but I did know she might be a girl I could talk to without any reservation in this manor.

"Asuta-sama... you are really an unfathomable person..."

Chiffon Chel said with a warm smile.

"You are from the Post Station Town, yet you can cook such delicious meals... You are a westerner, yet you protected me... And despite your gentle appearance, you are unexpectedly strong..."

"Huh, there aren't many who are as weak as me in the Forest's Edge settlement."

But that youth named Roy was weaker than me. Maybe I got stronger after living in Forest's Edge.

"How strange... We will be parting in a few more hours; I'm really reluctant to do so... This is the first time I felt this way since I left my hometown..."

"Chiffon Chel, I don't dislike you either..."

After Pyschkurewuss fall from grace, would they be freed?

Considering the relationship between the west and the north, that was too optimistic... But I had to tell Kamyua Yost that I met a girl like her here.

"...It is getting dark..."

Chiffon Chel stood up, walked behind the screen, and came back with a candle stand. No, it might be more apt to call it a lantern. It had a metal handle, and a fire burned inside the glass cover.

Light from the small window used for illumination was gradually fading. It was almost time for dinner.

Would my dish be to their liking? Even if they enjoyed it, would I be released as agreed on? If not... I would need to consider escaping by force.

*Ai Fa... She must have reached home and heard about this from Ludo Wu...*

How angry would Ai Fa be that I didn't come home on time, and how sad would she be.

My heart ached and my head was heavy. The dark murkiness in my heart turned into black mist and seeped out of my body. Ai Fa who didn't know anything must be in even more pain. If not for that, I would have cried out loud shamelessly.

And so, I spent a torturous time quietly in the dim room... When I was almost at my limit and put my legs onto the floor, the door opened without any warning from the outside.

"Asuta of the Fa house, my employer permits an audience with you."

It was one of the guards keeping watch over me.

Maybe this wasn't anything special, so I glared at his arrogant face.

"This way, please. Woman... Stay here."

I could finally see the one behind all this. Anyway, I had to handle this calmly. I asked Chiffon Chel to prepare my change of clothes and stepped into the corridor.

*Is it Pyschkurewuss himself, or his minion? I can finally find out the truth.*

I wondered as I walked down the passageway that was still dim despite the numerous lanterns.

The route there was longer than the trip to the bath hall and kitchen. It was just like a maze, with endless brick walls and carpeted floors everywhere, with no way to discern their differences. Even if I had the chance to escape from the guards, I wouldn't be able to make it outside or even make it back to the room I came from.

After walking down the stairwell, we walked for quite a distance before climbing up some stairs. A few minutes later, a door finally appeared before us.

This door was obviously different from the one I saw before. It was very big, reinforced

with steel on the edge. The carvings on it looked more grand, and it felt intimidating like the gates to hell.

“Asuta of the Fa house has arrived!”

One of the soldiers announced loudly. The door was so thick that they couldn’t hear from the inside if he didn’t yell so loudly. A deep male voice came from the inside: “Enter.”

The soldiers pulled open the heavy door.

Bright light poured onto the corridor. It seemed really bright inside. To avoid being blinded, I squinted my eyes as I walked inside.

And then... I met her.

“Stop.”

A low male voice boomed.

The door closed slowly, with two guards standing on either side of it.

*So, is she the one behind all this...?*

I gulped.

Kaslan Lutim once described Pyschkurewuss’ appearance to me. But there was no way she could be Pyschkurewuss.

“My mistress... This is Asuta of the Fa house.”

The man said in a deep voice. The one who had been speaking all the while was just the bodyguard beside his mistress. His armor looked more elegant than the one on the soldiers beside me, and he seemed to have quite a high standing. However, his dressing didn’t really match how he looked. He was short, fat, and had the face of a retarded cow.

However, all that didn’t matter.

What was important that the mistress of this room was lying on the soft couch and glaring at me... She was the one who put me through this terrible experience.

“Hmmp. He doesn’t look like much, isn’t he just a brat?”

A high pitched voice commented.

It was a high pitched tone like a child, and the words were a little slurred.

No...

She was unquestionably a very young girl.

“This child actually made that dish, how incredible. Is he really Asuta of the Fa house?”

“Yes, he is.”

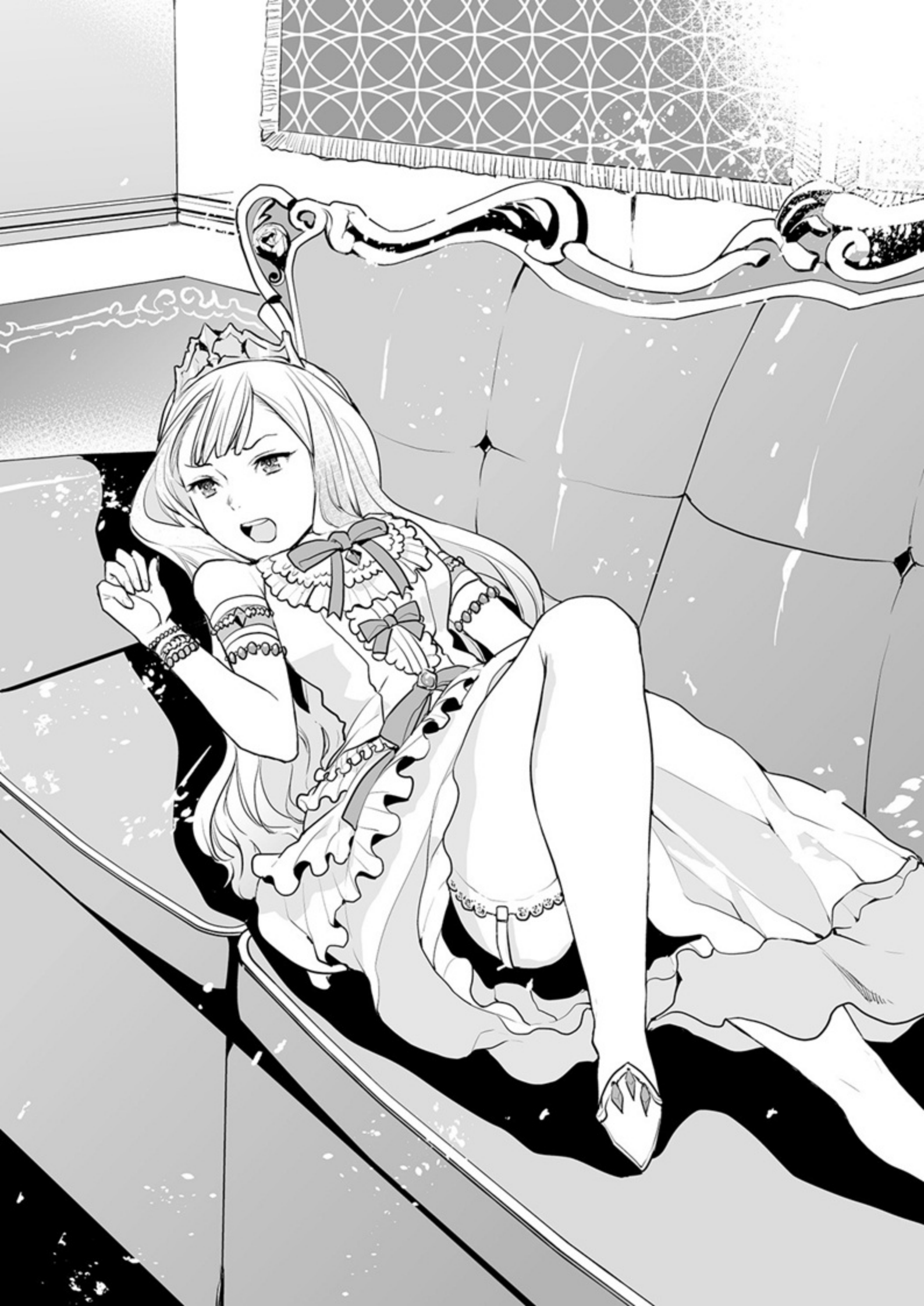
The short and fat bodyguard answered in a deep voice, and that girl checked me out after a grunt. She had arrogant and condescending eyes, but she was just a kid.

She was about ten and was lying lazily on the couch so I couldn’t tell her height. But she was petite and thin. A white dress with lots of ribbons were covering her tiny body.

The design covered her upper body perfectly, and below her waist was a multi-layered dress. It was as elegant as a wedding dress.

Her bare shoulders and arms were ivory skinned and adorned with silver and gem accessories. Her brown hair draped onto her chest, with a sparkling silver hair accessory on her head.

The girl lay onto the couch lazily, with half of her fluffy skirt crushed under her. What a waste.



She was probably the daughter of some noble, and she had the face that befitted one. Her light brown eyes were wide open and glaring at me. She had a petite nose, petal-like lips were even and proportionate, her face was small and seemed smaller than my palm, and her skin was smooth and seemed untouched by any sunlight.

However, the proper face of this little girl seemed displeased and had a negative expression that was completely different from Ai Fa and Lala Wu.

*She looks quite handful...* An alarm rang in my mind.

“...What are you looking at?”

The girl said in a flustered voice:

“Are you misunderstanding something just because your cooking is somewhat good? Normally, a lowly person like you wouldn’t be standing before me.”

I already thought of several ways to rebuke her.

But I might get a lashing if I acted too rashly. The things this girl said filled me with unpleasant feelings.

“...So you are the one behind my abduction to this place?”

I wasn’t sure how to interact with such a tiny tyrant, so I tried my best to keep my tone gentle. But I still replied to her in a not too polite way.

The girl didn’t have any problem with my tone, but she pouted impatiently:

“You still want to talk about that now? Well... Who are you? In which country did you learn your cooking techniques? You are definitely not from Genos, right?”

“Before asking about you, shouldn’t you introduce yourself? Who are you?”

“I’m Lifuria.”

She probably thought that this was good enough for a self-introduction... Lifuria continued:

“I had never tasted such cooking before. Where did you learn to cook? You look like a mixed-blood to me, are you part Semu? Jaguar? Or could it be Mahildra?”

“My hometown is an island from outside this continent, a country called Japan.”

I answered without any proof, and Lifuria opened her eyes wide: “A migrant?”

“I see, you are a migrant... That explains why I have never seen your cookings before! What is a migrant doing in the middle of the continent? Migrants trade a little with Mahildra and Jaguar, but they then go home right after doing so.”

“No, I’m...”

“Kimyusu and karon can only be found in Selva and Jaguar, right? Then why can you cook like this? And you are a young brat too. Who are you?”

It looped back to the original question again.

I decided to organize the situation to figure out what was happening. In the meantime, I surveyed the room. It was an extravagant room adequate for a noble, but it wasn’t too big. The flooring was covered in rugs, and the walls were covered with drapes sewn with delicate designs, covering almost the entire brick wall.

The couch the girl was lying on was big enough for four adult men to sit on it.

Between me and the mistress was a long and wide table covered in a grape-colored tablecloth and decorated with baskets filled with all sorts of flowers.

In the corners of the rooms were strange stone statues. They were probably used to ward off evil and also served as decoration. It had the head of a lion, torso of a man, and the legs of horses or deer, a very strange sort of chimera.

It was carved out of a very smooth marble-like stone, and they were all facing the middle of the room with their swords or spears. Lions baring their fangs, bulging shoulder muscles hoisting weapons, and hooves raised up high were all carved boldly, giving an impression that they might move at any moment.

The illumination inside the room deserved a mention. On the high ceiling was a sprawling chandelier, and its white light shone into every corner of the room. It was



about 1 m wide and shaped like a crown. It wasn't too lavished in my hometown, but considering the civilization standard of this world, it was probably a marvel. The material was either glass or crystal, and the light from dozens of candles reflected chaotically within it, making it shine like the sun.

I wondered what the candles were made from. They gave off a sweet and gentle aroma in the room and had minimal smoke, so it was definitely expensive and rarer than the animal fats used in the Forest's Edge.

"...Answer my question. Why are you just standing there?"

Lifuria rushed me with an angry voice.

"...I can't give you an answer that will satisfy your curiosity. When I came to, I found myself in this place."

I answered carefully.

"In any case, I'm not from this continent, and there are many people my age who can cook back in my hometown. You might find this queer, but that's how it is."

"...Hmmp."

"So, you don't intend to answer my question? Who are you, why did you bring me here? Threatening me with a knife is a mockery of the law."

The girl shut her mouth and then glared at me unhappily.

"That man over there..."

I turned towards the bodyguard standing beside the couch.

"You are the one who abducted me, right? Why would someone who works in a noble's manor commit such a lawless act?"

Part of the reason I said that was to bait out his words.

However, his stout stature and deep voice did seem familiar.

He was a westerner with yellowish brown skin and curly dark brown hair. His face was fat in an unhealthy way, and it was hard to judge how old he was. But he seemed somewhat capable. His brown eyes under his slightly swollen eyelid were dull, as he glared at me without a word.

“I have an idea who owns this manor. However, he should be attending a conference in the Genos castle right now. Does he know what you lot are doing? He definitely doesn’t want to have any trouble with the denizens of Forest's Edge right now.”

“...”

“You are Lifuria, right? How are you related to Count Pyschkurewuss Turan?”

Lifuria stood up suddenly.

Her fluffy dress shone under the light of the chandelier. And then... Lifuria suddenly stomped her feet.

“I don’t care about father’s issues! Father isn’t in, so I’m the mistress of this manor!”

“Father... Lifuria, so you are Pyschkurewuss’ daughter.”

It wasn’t a complicated conclusion. Since enslaved northerners worked here, this must be Pyschkurewuss’ manor, although Pyschkurewuss was in the Genos castle... I had finally solved this contradiction. And since she was Pyschkurewuss’ daughter, she might have heard about me from Dell.

The doubts in my mind had been cleared.

Pyschkurewuss was definitely not involved in this. He would never permit this to happen while he was away.

“Yes, I get the gist of it now. So... What do you plan to do about me? You would have forbidden me from doing business in the Post Station Town if I didn’t cook a proper meal, right?”

“...”

“As I explained, I’m a chef from a foreign nation, and I already did my very best. I’m not

sure if the locals would like this taste, but I won't hold back."

I suppressed my bloodlust a little and said to her in a gentler tone.

Taking Neil hostage was unforgivable, but since this stemmed from the curiosity and mischief of a daughter of a noble who grew up in a glasshouse, we could end this without further incident.

"I don't need your compliments, just let me go home. I hope you will allow me to continue my business like before. That is all I'm asking for. Can you grant my request?"

Lifuria pursed her lips in silence.

A girl like this shouldn't have the authority to close my stall, but it was hard to say for sure.

In any case, I didn't want to drag this any longer. If my stall gets shut down over something so ridiculous, there would be a riot in the Post Station Town. When Pyschkurewuss and Malfreed return from the castle five days later, we would have another chance to appeal and negotiate.

I was fine with anything if I got to go home. That was my only request.

Lifuria finally scowled her beautiful eyebrows nefariously and said: "...You are really an infuriating man."

I thought I might have spoken too anxiously, so I straightened my posture.

But Lifuria didn't burst out in anger and just straightened her slender fingers on the table. There was something akin to a tiny treasure chest on the table, and Lifuria took out a small metallic piece that was shimmering with a tint of silver.

That metal piece was tossed through an air in the arc and fell by my feet. It was a silver plate, and the Fa house possessed quite a number of them. One silver plate was equivalent to a hundred white copper plates or a thousand red copper plates. The only other place I had seen this plate was at the money changer post in the Post Station Town.

"...You want me to take this as a reward? But this amount is too much."

By the way, I could earn one silver plate in four days. My daily profits were about 250 red copper plates.

I should just accept and hand it over to Neil as compensation for his troubles.

As I was thinking about that, Lifuria said with a malicious face:

“What are you talking about? This is payment for your work.”

“Payment?”

I picked up the silver plate and tilted my head quizzingly.

What was the difference between reward and payment?

“I have not acknowledged your work completely yet. In short, you have done a job that deserves this payment.”

“Hmm? I don’t really understand...”

“Next task will be tomorrow’s lunch. If you can serve a meal that satisfies me, I will give you another silver plate.”

Lifuria announced, dismissing everything I said, and turned around suddenly.

“I’m going to rest. Do your preparation for tomorrow then.”

“W-Wait! Are you kidding about lunch tomorrow? I thought I can go home whether you are satisfied or not?”

Lifuria stopped and cast a malicious sideways glance at me.

“You are so annoying. I’m the mistress of this manor, so you have to obey me if you are in this manor.”

“How can you be so lawless! Even if you are a daughter of a noble, there are things you can and can’t do!”

I stepped forth unconsciously.

The guards beside me grabbed my arms, but I didn't stay silent.

"I will be frank, doing this won't help your father at all! Your father is in all sorts of talks with the denizens of Forest's Edge. If his daughter did something like this, it would make his position very awkward!"

"...I said you are annoying."

"You are the one who should listen properly! If you don't want to make matters worse, let me go right now! If you stop now, it will just be laughed off as a bad joke! If you worsen your crime..."

"You said my father's position would turn awkward?"

Lifuria cut me off again. A devilish smile appeared on her proportionate face.

"That's interesting. What kind of face will he make when he returns in five days. I'm looking forward to it."

"Hey, you...!"

"The time limit is five days. My father should be back in the morning of the fifth day, so make a dish that satisfies me before that. I will pay you another silver plate, and I might even let you go home early."

Lifuria then showed a mischievous expression.

"...But if your cooking taste too nasty, I won't let you do your business in the Post Station Town no matter what father says. If you don't want that, work hard."

"Hey, wait!"

My angry roar bounced off the petite back of that girl.

And so, the young tyrant disappeared through the door opened by her stout bodyguard... Meanwhile, the guards grabbed both my arms; my body was quivering with rage, with a shimmering silver coin in my hand.

*What kind of joke is this!? I have enough of this farce!*

When I was escorted back to my room, my heart was still simmering with rage. Pyschkurewuss wasn't involved in this farce, which was good news, but I found it hard to accept being confined to this manor for five days.

Just what was Lifuria thinking? She only did this after learning about my culinary skill from Dell. Even if I took a million steps back and forgave what she did, I still couldn't accept her going back on her words and continuing to confine me.

She might be on bad terms with her father, Pyschkurewuss, but that had nothing to do with me. I wished they could settle this father and daughter feud somewhere else.

Anyway, it was useless for me to fume over this. Chiffon Chel who was supervising me spoke to me timidly:

"Asuta-sama, are you alright...? Would you like some wine before turning in...?"

"No, no need."

"T-Then, would you like something to eat... If you need to stay in the manor, would you like to eat something before sleeping...?"

I didn't want to stay here at all.

I really wanted to shout, but Chiffon Chel was innocent.

"Erm, I want to ask you for a favor, Chiffon Chel."

"Yes... How may I help...?"

"Are there any servants or guards that look like easterners in this manor?"

"Easterners...?"

Chiffon Chel tilted her head troublingly.

I felt she wouldn't be able to answer this question, but she thought over it carefully:

"Well... I don't think there are any in this manor..."

"Which means, one of the servants that commute to work here might be an Easterner?"

"No... Basically, the guards and servants all stay in this manor... Some people like the assistants of the chef have other work so they can commute to work... But I had never seen any dark-skinned people when going to the kitchen to test for poison..."

Chiffon Chel tilted her head the other way as she said that.

"However... There is quite a number of Semy people who visit in order to conduct business with the master... They usually return in the same day, so I don't have any chance to serve them..."

"I see. Thank you."

So, even if Sangjura was related to this manor, he wasn't lodging here.

The last doubt in my mind was Sangjura.

The one Sangjura called his "employer" seemed to be Lifuria and not Pyschkurewuss. But why was Sangjura employed by this young tyrant?

And did he approach my stall because he was ordered too? Were his smile and gentle attitude all a trick to make me let down my guard? When I thought about that, my mind became a mess due to the rage and feelings of emptiness because of the betrayal of someone I trusted.

*But now wasn't the time to be agitated over something like this.*

I shook my head hard and cleared my mind.

"Chiffon Chel, I believe you, so I want to ask you one more thing."

"Hmm... what is it...?"

“I want to escape from this manor. Can you let me go?”

I knew very well that this was an illogical question. If she was loyal to her master, contrary to what I thought, this would all be in vain.

But, if I wanted to escape, I needed to take care of this girl, who would be spending the night with me in the same room, and hide this from the guards outside the door. I wasn't confident of doing so.

Chiffon Chel didn't look surprised and said: “Well... It's impossible for me to do anything... And this manor is guarded by a large number of soldiers...”

“I think the chances of success are very low. But I might get killed if I fail.”

“That's not true... They won't do something as dangerous as killing you... Lifuria-sama is just a ten-year-old child...”

“I have said this many times, I was abducted to here at knifepoint. Wasn't that the princess who gave this order?”

“That might be so, but I think Lifuria-sama only gave the order to invite Asuta-sama here... I'm also not sure how it turned into something so barbaric...”

My thoughts wandered back to the bodyguard who was like a bull beside that girl. He must be the one who carried out his mistress orders in such a way.

“So I will just get lashing if I fail, huh. I feel braver now.”

“Asuta-sama... that's dangerous...”

Chiffon Chel sat down on the bed and grabbed my arm. She wasn't wavering at all and had the face of someone coaxing a child.

“Lashing isn't child play... I'm fortunate to only have only suffered it a few times... It is a pain that will make you want to give up on life...”

“...Is that so?”

“...Would you like to see my back...?”



“N-No need.”

That caught me completely off-guard, and I moved away from Chiffon Chel with complicated feelings.

“Even so, I don’t want to submit to this fate. I’m not asking you to help, but can you turn a blind eye to this?”

“...Why are you doing something so precarious...? You can return home safely in five days even if you don’t run, right?”

“I can’t trust that so readily. When the real master returns from the castle and learns of his daughter’s lawless act, he might just bury me into the darkness.”

She answered me with a sad and quiet smile. She didn’t refute the possibility of Pyschkurewuss doing that.

My impression of Pyschkurewuss was on point; this was such a heartwarming moment.

“As I said, I think it’s worth risking my life to break out of this fate. Can you let me go...?”

“Yes... But the door is locked from the outside, and the guards will keep watch through the night...?”

“That’s true. So I have to escape through the window.”

I just noticed the large window behind the screen. There was a curtain that was made of sturdy material too. This room was on the second floor, and I could climb down to the first floor if I made use of the curtain.

“If you will let me go, I plan to tie you up to give the illusion that I used brute force to escape. You won’t be lashed in that case, correct?”

“Yes... You are already in danger, and you are still thinking about others...?”

Chiffon Chel smiled happily.

“It can’t be helped if I get a lashing... Please, don’t worry about that...”

“Then... Do you want to escape together?”

I leaned towards Chiffon Chel.

“I might be coercing you to do something bad... But you will be lashed either way, why not bet on this chance?”

“No need... I’m different from Asuta-sama; if I fail in my escape attempt, I will definitely be executed... Not by Lifuria-sama, but the master who will return in five days...”

My understanding of the slavery system was too naive. Chiffon Chel probably thought of me as a fool.

“If Asuta-sama is determined to follow this through, I won’t stop you... Please, follow the path you wish to take... I will stay here and pray for your success...”

“But, you might get a lashing?”

“Please, don’t worry. But... When I heard that Asuta-sama will be staying in this manor for five days, I felt a little happy... So I’m a little reluctant...”

Chiffon Chel then smiled again.

I couldn’t tell what she was thinking with that smile, and she looked just like a fairy.

“Asuta-sama is really unfathomable... The easterners and southerners sympathize with me too, but no one treated me as kindly as Asuta-sama...”

“That was definitely because I came from a country without any slavery. And I’m a denizen of Forest's Edge. The denizens of Forest's Edge are persecuted for changing their faith. I don’t really understand the war between the northerners and westerners, but I can’t accept people being judged because of their heritage.”

Chiffon Chel muttered with a smile: “Is that so...” I still didn’t know if her heart was filled with despair.

“Pardon me, I will be making a rash attempt to escape. If escape is unlikely, I will return before the guards find out... You won’t need to get a lashing then.”

“...I will pray for Asuta’s success...”

Given what might become of Chiffon Chel, I felt really guilty for only thinking of running away by myself with such abysmal chances.

However, I didn’t feel like covering myself with the blanket and going to sleep. Lifuria’s words were too decisive so I couldn’t be sure that things would end well five days later. Therefore, I had to do my best and fight for it.

“...You really don’t need me to help...?”

“No! Please, don’t peek, okay?”

First, I changed into the clothes I asked Chiffon Chel to return to this room. My own white T-shirt and canvas shoes, as well as the vest and waist cloth Ai Fa gifted me... I then tied the wrinkled white towel on my head, and I was done. I placed the silver coin on top of the clothes I took off.

Next, I prepared for my escape.

I went around the screen and took the curtain down. I tore it vertically with my teeth and fingers and then tugged at it to confirm it was strong enough before tying them together. After taking down three curtains from the two windows, I made a strong enough substitute for a rope.

I then used the leftover cloth to tie up Chiffon Chel’s arms, which made me feel really guilty.

If Chiffon Chel called for help, she wouldn’t need to worry about lashing, but she didn’t do that.

“Please, stuff my mouth too... If I pretend to be unconscious, I won’t get faulted...”

I stuffed her mouth as she asked and then let her lie in my bed behind the screen. Finally, I nodded at her and blew out the fire in the lantern before opening one window.

It was completely dark outside. The moon and the stars were high up in the skies, but the entire world was black. But it seemed that I didn't need to worry about guards patrolling with lanterns.

I investigated when it was still bright outside, and there seemed to be a wide courtyard outside. If I walked straight down the courtyard, I would reach the stone wall around the manor. In this city protected by rock walls, this manor was surrounded by another layer of stone wall.

Even if I wasn't discovered by the guards, I couldn't climb over this rock wall. If I did make it over the wall, I would be inside an unknown city.

Could I exit the city without an entry permit? This was an escape attempt with too many unknowns and almost zero chance of success. If I failed, I would be lucky to just get a lashing. Before pushing myself to take on this retarded challenge, I tied my handmade rope to a bedpost.

I leaned out and looked around, and found the windows in the other room shut. After confirming that, I lowered the other end of the rope out the window.

*Okay, let's go.*

Climbing at an inappropriate time.

The ground was about four meters away, which wasn't a fatal fall. But the ground was stone-paved, so I might fracture a bone. I trusted the arm strength I trained in the harsh life within the Forest's Edge and started moving out the window.

When I put my entire body weight on it, the rope started to creak. With my feet on the wall, I slowly and carefully lowered myself. My arms started shaking in no time. The night breeze was really comfortable, but I was sweating all over. I needed to replenish my calories before embarking on such exercises.

But I wasn't discovered by anyone, and I didn't slip. After climbing down before exhausting my strength, I landed steadily.

I rested my hands on my knees in the dark and caught my breath.

The world was engulfed in darkness with a tint of blue. I could see the surroundings clearly after my eyes adjusted to the darkness. Only the grounds around the building were paved with stone; the grounds five meters away was trimmed grass.

*It's dim here, just how big is this courtyard?*

In any case, no one would patrol a place without light. The guards were probably watching the yard and the outside too.

As I strode forth while thinking about that, a window about a meter away opened with a creak.

I quickly leaned against the wall, and my calm heart started racing again.

Was this a coincidence, or did I make some noise without realizing it? I started praying that no one would lean outside.

My prayer was unanswered as a girl's pale face poked out.

It wasn't Lifuria, but someone slightly older.

Her beautiful profile surprised me. She was incredibly gorgeous, with a well proportioned nose and gentle curves outlining her forehead to her jaw. Her skin was pale white. Lifuria had pale skin too, but she wasn't as white as this girl. She looked just like a glass statue under the illumination of the moonlight.

Her brown bangs drape over her smooth forehead. I could see her left side of her face, and the silver hair accessory she wore on her hair.

She was resting her hand on the window sill and leaning her body forward. On her body was a lightly colored nightgown that was on the thin side.

Her hair was very short, and I could see her pure nape.

A girl with an angelic face.

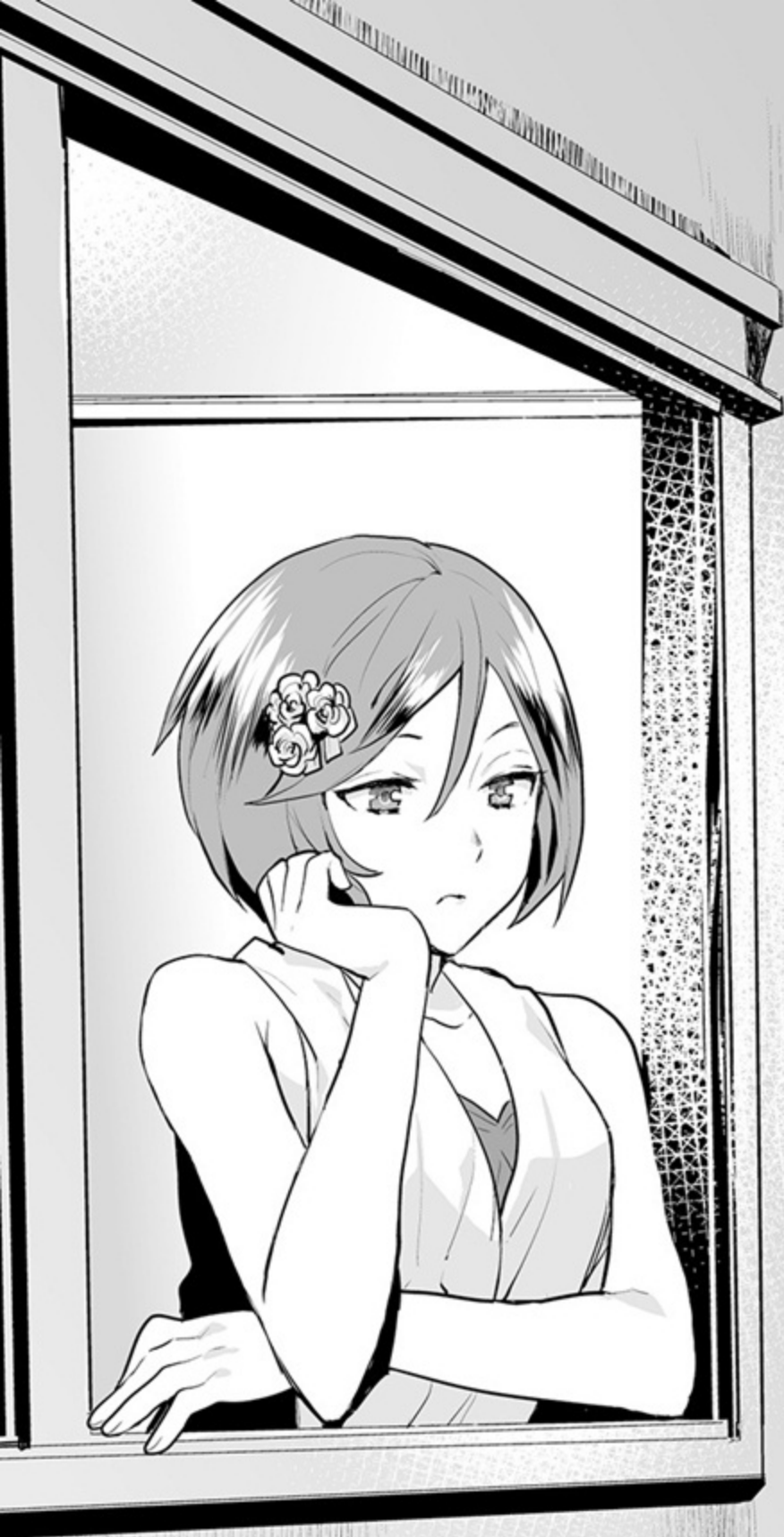
But her eyes were melancholic, and she was looking out into the night with a hint of sadness.

She sighed softly through her fair lips... And, before pulling her face back into the room, she looked my way nonchalantly.

The thin brows hanging over her large eyes became round from surprise.

“...Asuta! What are you doing here!?”

I was shocked too.



The face which was as serene as an angel's carving suddenly showed human emotions and reverted back to a timid girl.

"D-Dell? So it is you..."

I stood stiffly from shock, and Dell quickly scanned the dark surroundings. She looked anxious.

"Forget it! Come here quickly! If you stand there, you will get mauled to death by the guard dogs!"

"G-Guard dogs?"

"Yes! Guard dogs are set loose in the yard at night, so you can't go there! Ah, you don't know what are dogs, right? It's quite common in the south... Enough with that, come over quickly!"

I was more troubled than Dell and started moving towards her unconsciously. She then pulled me by the collar into the dim room.

"Ah, that scared me... Don't frighten me like that! Asuta, what are you doing here!?"

Dell shouted and then covered her own mouth with both hands. At this moment, someone knocked the door on the wall adjoining to the window.

"Dell-sama, do you need something?"

This was the familiar voice of Dell's escort, Lavis.

"Nothing! I'm just talking to myself. We need to work early tomorrow too, so you should turn in early, okay?"

"...Sweet dreams, Dell-sama."

After saying that with an emotionless and stiff voice, Lavis didn't say any more.

There was a door in this room leading to another room, and Lavis was staying there.

"Dell... So you really are staying in this manor."



“What do you mean by ‘really’? Asuta, why are you in this city?”

Dell quietly closed the window as she lowered her voice and then looked surprised again:

“Ah, could it be... The dishes we had earlier were made by Asuta?”

“Ah, the kimyusu meat dish made with karon milk? That’s me.”

“So it was you. Ah, that tasted delicious!”

Dell said with a big smile. This was an angelic expression in another sense.

“Because I ate a delicious meal, it reminded me of Asuta. As I opened the window, I was wondering if you are well and if you are already sleeping, and then the real Asuta appeared before me! I almost died from fright!”

So Dell was thinking about me when making that sad face. For some reason, I started feeling bashful.

And because of the light inside the room, I could see Dell’s face clearly. Her uneven colored hair and eyes that were as beautiful as jade... Dell, who was dressed differently than usual, was right before me.

She had a plain and thin nightgown, with laces on her collar and her sleeves. Her thigh that was much whiter than her dress lay bare before me. Her bangs were held up by a silver accessory, showing a little of her forehead. Just being dressed like this made Dell look like a completely different person and really cute.

No, she was one in ten thousand in terms of cuteness in the first place. And Dell looked even cuter right now. Once again, I regretted how blind I was in mistaking such a cute girl for a boy.

“...So, Asuta, are you cooking in this manor now? Aren’t the denizens of Forest’s Edge getting along just fine with the people in the city?”

Even though staying here for too long would be dangerous, but meeting her here was like encountering a Buddha in hell. So I gave her a brief breakdown of the situation.

“Huh?” “Really?” “Uwah...” Her face changed like a kaleidoscope as Dell listened to me until the end.

“Erm... That means, boasting about Asuta’s cooking to Lifuria led to all this?”

Dell showed an incredibly sad expression.

“I’m really sorry... I caused a lot of trouble for Asuta...”

“That’s not true. To me, the disaster is that brown-haired princess. If she was logical like a normal person, things wouldn’t have turned out like this.”

I couldn’t stand seeing Dell being discouraged like a depressed puppy.

“But Lifuria only got serious because Asuta’s cooking is very delicious, right?”

“Got serious? What do you mean?”

“Actually, there were two dishes made with karon milk and kimyusu meat. Lifuria asked us to try and see which was better.”

Dell looked even more apologetic.

“The other dish must have been made by the resident chef. It was a vegetable stew made with karon curd and kimyusu meat. But the soup with a lot of vegetables was clearly tastier... Asuta, you made that soup, correct?”

“Yes.”

“I knew it! That is an amazing dish! But... I just think it tastes amazing! As expected of the manor known for its cookings! Lifuria must be intrigued by this.”

So the three portions I made were eaten by Lifuria, Dell, and Dell’s father. Dell’s father was a steel merchant from Jaguar and an important business partner of Pyschkurewuss.

Leaving all that aside, there were still things that didn’t make sense.

“If the chef that was abducted made more delicious food, wouldn’t they feel frustrated? I don’t understand.”

“No, Lifuria probably didn’t expect you to make such a delicious meal. That girl is always saying that the chefs in the Post Station Town can’t make a proper meal.”

Dell did say something like that before. That was why she wanted to bring my cooking back to the city in order to change Lifuria’s mind.

“Now that I think about it, Lifuria looked unhappy when we started eating that dish. She was probably hoping that we would praise the other dish and then call Asuta over to shame us.”

“Uwah, how devious!”

“Instead of devious, she just doesn’t want to lose. Well... I don’t like to lose either, that’s why Lifuria did that...”

“Dell, don’t take it to heart. But... Why did she confine me? Is she trying to compete until I lose?”

“Hmm, how should I put this? It has nothing to do with competition, Lifuria simply fell in love with Asuta’s dishes. She also wolfed down your cooking with her brows raised angrily.”

Like father, like daughter, I guess. I was targeted by a troublesome person.

“The girl’s father didn’t participate in this incident, correct? By the way, she only did something so retarded because her father left her behind to watch the house.”

“Yes, that must be it. When I talked about Asuta, the old man wasn’t interested and just smiled. If he was around, he would never let Lifuria do something like this.”

Dell leaned in close after saying that.

“Asuta, you can’t accept Lifuria’s way of doing things and want to escape, right?”

“Yes. I know it is reckless though.”

“It’s too reckless! I told you earlier about the guard dogs in the yard, and the manor is surrounded by walls that are this— tall. And aside from the guard dogs, there are guards patrolling the walls. This is the manor of one of the prominent nobles in Genos city after all.”

“Hmm...”

“Even if you escaped, you can’t leave the city. The drawbridge is raised and passage prohibited at night, and you will need an entry permit during the day. You will be apprehended as a criminal if you force your way through.”

Things seemed hopeless.

I was depressed, and Dell looked at me worriedly.

“Sorry, Asuta, this is all my fault. But... Your culinary skill is better than the city’s chef, just as I thought! Why don’t you become this manor’s chef? You can earn enough silver plates and gold plates to enjoy for the rest of your life.”

“No. I can’t serve someone who did something like this, and I don’t want to abandon the Forest’s Edge.”

“I see. But it feels like a waste for Asuta’s cooking to be confined to the Post Station Town...”

Dell’s face seemed to say that this was a pity. It was probably an honor to build up a business in the city too.

I wouldn’t dismiss the value of doing so, but I was raised in a family restaurant. Instead of nobles, I preferred to cook for the people in town. They might be real nobles, but I still didn’t want to be their exclusive chef.

“Erm, Dell, can you help me persuade Lifuria? I want to return to Forest’s Edge as soon as possible.”

“No, I can’t. Lifuria will never listen to me... And if I did butt in, she will just take it even more seriously.”

“Then, can you relay my situation to the people in the Post Station Town? You just need

to let the innkeepers that do business with me know, and then they can pass the message to the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

“I will be a little busy, and can’t leave the city. My father wants to expand the business as much as possible while that old Count is away. My father has a hunch that relying just on that old man alone is dangerous...”

“I think that is the right choice. Anyone in the Post Station Town will do, I just want to let my friends and family know that I’m safe.”

“Family, you mean that mean blonde girl?”

Dell puffed her cheeks.

But she became deflated with an apologetic face.

“Never mind that for now, this will be hard... Even if I told my father, he will definitely say that helping the denizens of Forest's Edge will earn the ire of the nobles... And my father took my entry pass away.”

“Is that so...”

I remembered Dell’s escort Lavis. Dell was on great terms with me, but he was still adamant on being unfriendly towards us. To the Jaguars, the denizens of Forest's Edge were traitors who deserted the southern god. Those who knew me through my business in the Post Station Town were nice to me, but if not for that, they would have viewed the denizens of Forest's Edge with contempt.

“But there’s no need to make the trip to the Post Station Town, right? I can just tell the guards about this, behind my father’s back! Even if she is a noble, this is still a crime!”

“No, the guards in the city are also part of the towns guard, and not the castle guards, right?”

“Huh? I don’t really understand how things are in the western kingdom, but the castle guards protect the castle, right? Be it the city or the Post Station Town, aren’t them all just guards?”

That wouldn’t do. The commander of the townsguard was Pyschkurewuss’ brother. If

he learned of Lifuria's crimes, he would definitely cover it up.

"The Forest's Edge is on bad terms with the towns guard. I'm sorry, but don't tell the people in the city about this."

"Huh? But... I don't want Asuta to die to the guard dogs?"

Dell held my hands with an anxious face. She had firm and warm hands.

"I don't want to die in vain either. But... I'm at my wits' end..."

There had definitely been a big fuss in the Post Station Town. But the problem was, the Post Station Town didn't have any evidence that someone related to Pyschkurewuss had abducted me. Therefore, the denizens of Forest's Edge and Zashuma wouldn't be able to do anything about this.

"I'm so useless... If not for me, Asuta wouldn't have met with something like this..."

The expressive Dell started to tear up.

I squeezed out a smile with everything I had.

"If you have the time, it will be great if you can relay the message to my friends from Forest's Edge. You are the only one I can depend on in this city, Dell."

"I understand. If I have the time, I will do that, I promise!"

Dell seemed to be too loud, and someone knocked on the door again.

"Sorry for disturbing, Dell-sama. Is something the matter...?"

"Dream talking!"

"...Is that so?"

Our secret meeting was almost at its limit. The rope I used to escape was still hanging there. If someone discovered it, Chiffon Chel will get a lashing for nothing.

"I'm going back to my room then. Thank you for listening to me for so long."

“Ah, wait! One last thing... It’s about that kid Lifuria...”

Dell lowered her eyes and looked reluctant to speak, but she still made up her mind in the end and said:

“Actually, I also hate the nobles. If it wasn’t for the sake of business, I wouldn’t want anything to do with them. But I don’t hate that little girl.”

“Huh? Is that so?”

“Yes. That girl isn’t happy about being a noble at all. Her father only cares about work and cuisines and have no time for her. She also needs to learn in the morning and has no time to play... That girl craves for a delicious meal for a different reason from her father.”

The young tyrant that throws her temper. Which meant, there was a reason why she turned out this way.

“Doesn’t Lifuria have any other kin aside from her father? Isn’t the Count Turan house a prominent noble house in Genos?”

“Yes, she has plenty of relatives, but the only ones living in this manor are Lifuria and that old man. There are also servants and old man. Or guests like my father and me. That girl doesn’t have anyone she can talk easily with.”

“I see...”

“So she doesn’t care about being lectured by her father for doing something like this... That child probably just wants attention from her father.”

“Is that so. That’s quite pitiful.”

But that meant I had nowhere to vent my rage.

So I was just caught up in a quarrel between father and daughter.

“I can’t forgive her for treating Asuta like this, but that girl probably didn’t think Asuta would have any complaints. A chef getting invited to this manor is an honor, and she

is probably wondering why you are not grateful at all.”

“Hmm, this is a difference in perspectives.”

“And abducting you by force without even asking is probably not the intention of Lifuria, but something Moose did on his own.”

“Moose?”

“If you saw Lifuria, you have probably met Moose, right? He is a short and fat brown-haired bodyguard that looks like a karon.”

“Oh, I see. I think he is the one who abducted me too.”

“I suspected as much! That guy has been Lifuria’s guard since she was born. Loyalty is a nice way of putting it, but he is willing to do anything for Lifuria. That’s scary in its own way. I was almost beaten up by him when I quarreled with Lifuria. And, of course, Lavis stopped him.”

“...Hmm. So a selfish and arrogant princess and a body guard that follow orders blindly.”

What a chilling combination.

However, I still wasn’t sure if Sangjura was involved. I still confirmed one thing — that Moose was a problem.

Neil must have seen Moose’s face when he entered the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> disguised as a guest. If he hid in the city, he wouldn’t need to worry about being recognized and might let his guard down. If I informed Zashuma about this, Malfreed could take action.

“Well then, Dell, could you please visit the Post Station Town, if you have the chance, and tell them about Moose? My comrades can then make a report against him.”

“I understand... What about Lifuria? I might just scold her out of the blue when I see her.”

“No, that’s too dangerous. Don’t let her know that I have met you, Dell.”



“But that girl might boast to me though? And say something like ‘I caught your favorite chef!’ or something.”

“Huh? Then she is admitting that she is a kidnapper?”

“She can just say that she paid to hire you. From that girl’s personality, she wouldn’t just keep quiet.”

That girl was too obnoxious.

Could we make use of this? But I felt that things would develop in a negative way.

“If that happens, just say something appropriate to brush it off... Anyway, thank you for agreeing to pass the message to the Post Station Town. We should avoid drawing their suspicion for now.”

“Ugh... I get it. I will endure it as much as possible. It’s my fault that things turn out this way, I’m very sorry, Asuta...”

Dell made a depressed face.

I couldn’t squeeze out a smile anymore and patted her shoulder to cheer her up.

“Don’t apologize for that. And since Dell will be eating it too, I won’t need to cook with a feeling of emptiness tomorrow.”

“Yes... I’m glad to taste Asuta’s cookings too.”

Dell smiled bashfully, and I nodded at her as I placed my hands on the window sill.

After checking for guard dogs and patrols, I started climbing again. I returned to the room all sweaty, and Chiffon Chel who was lying in the same position as I left her welcomed me with gentle eyes.

“Asuta-sama... we meet again...”

I undid her bonds and gag, and Chiffon Chel smiled at me with warm eyes.

“I hope you won’t be mad... But I’m really glad to see you...”

There were all sorts of people living their lives in this manor.

Some of them weren’t irredeemably bad. However, sadness and helplessness filled my heart. After two and a half months in this different world, this was the first time I was apart from Ai Fa at night.

How did Ai Fa feel about spending this night alone? I looked at the pale moonlight outside the window and suppressed my heartache with all my might.

# Chapter 3

## Enduring Days of Suffering

### 1

And so, I ushered in the morning in this manor built with stone.

The sixth day of the White month.

This was supposed to be the last day of the fourth stall contract. After completing my work, I had an appointment with Yumi's father to discuss our collaboration, but I had no choice but to skip.

Tomorrow would be the first of my two off days, and I was supposed to sell a large quantity of kiba meat to the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> and <Big Tree of the South Inn>. How was their business? I couldn't tell as I was held prisoner. Did the Wu clan take over my job? Or were they tied up because of some other incident?

Neil must have told the guards about this. It was unlikely for them to search the city just from that alone, moreover the manor of Pyschkurewuss, an influential noble.

Right now, it was impossible for the Post Station Town to connect this incident with Pyschkurewuss. Even if they felt that this was the doing of Pyschkurewuss, they didn't have any proof. And the culprit being Pyschkurewuss' daughter, Lifuria, made things even more complicated.

I entrusted one last bit of hope with Dell, but I knew the chances would be abysmal. She might be on friendly terms with me, but Dell was just someone in the wealthy caste of the city and could only act within the boundaries of the law.

I spent the night brooding and half asleep. With no idea on how to escape this manor or persuade Lifuria, morning came.

“...Let us go to the kitchen...”

When the bell had tolled for the third koku in the morning, I was assigned my first task of the day — making a light meal for Lifuria.

I needed to cleanse my body before working and was brought to the bath hall early in the morning. I refused any help from Chiffon Chel and washed myself in the steam bath.

I changed into a new chef attire and headed to the kitchen. Roy was waiting for me alone too.

“...Use banam honey for the dish.”

Roy said impatiently.

He seemed unhappier than yesterday and didn't even look me in the eye. He was probably holding a grudge over that incident with Chiffon Chel.

“Banam honey, it's that sweet honey over there, right? So I have to make a dish that brings out its sweetness?”

Roy turned his face away and said: “...Lifuria prefers desserts to normal dishes. The meals in the morning are usually desserts.”

This young man seemed to know that I have learned the name of his employer.

I didn't say anything. So I have to make desserts this time, huh.

I was filled with lots of worries, but I still stood here with a serious attitude towards cooking. Lifuria had no credibility at all, but she did say she would give me a silver plate and let me go if I made a dish that could satisfy her. I didn't want to let go of this meager ray of hope.

But making desserts was another matter. My efforts aside, I was a complete amateur at this.

“Erm, I don’t know anything about the desserts in this world... I mean, in Genos. Will making the fuwano sweets and then adding honey and fruits to them be fine?”

He ignored me. The atmosphere was more awkward than yesterday.

With no choice, I searched the food store by relying on my own memory.

I tasted all sorts of new ingredients in the Post Station Town and came up with new dishes. I already knew that other than vegetables, there were fruits in this world too. And I came across the lemon-like shiru.

But now wasn’t the time to use it. I chose a red raspberry-like fruit that was bunched together like grapes.

“What is this fruit?”

“...Aro.”

Aro, huh.

It was sour, but not as strongly as shiru. The taste was a mixture of strawberry and blueberry; the fruit had great texture and low sugar content.

There weren’t any fruit vendors in the Post Station Town. I remember grandma Mishel whom I had been buying chachi and gigo sold some. I enquired further, and it seemed to be a fruit exclusively used for mixing into fruit wines to enhance its flavor.

“I just need to boil the fuwano with water and bake it, correct?”

Roy nodded silently.

The princess would eat at noon, so I had three hours to cook. This included the basic work of baking fuwano.

I suppressed the sense of emptiness in my heart and put the fuwano powder into a container I grabbed offhand, and brought it to the working platform with the other ingredients. The fuwano powder was comparable to flour that was less sticky, but I could improve that by adding a little water.

To my surprise, fuwano powder was stickier than poitan. I added water until it was no longer powdery, and I could meld it into any shape I liked. It had the texture of a cookie dough.

*This feels different from flour.*

I flattened it so it would bake easier and then made a test batch.

And so, I baked fuwano that I had only tried a few times before. The result was chewier than poitan and felt like a denser type of naan. With neenon as the base ingredient, I could use the fuwano to wrap various vegetables and grilled kimyusu; this was the recipe for the kimyusu meat bun I ate together with Tara in the past.

But it wasn't a dessert. So I searched the memories from my hometown and decided to mix fuwano powder into karon milk and then add sugar and a kimyusu egg.

I used karon nyuushi when cooking it. And, of course, I was mimicking the cooking methods of a pancake.

This was the first time I was using a kimyusu egg. The shape was exactly like a chicken egg, but it was one size smaller, about as big as a silkie egg I tried before back home.

I broke it carefully, and a lemon colored egg yolk and transparent egg white fell onto the plate. It was no different from a chicken egg.

I heard that kimyusu was a strange bird with wings on its head, so it was fortunate that its meat and eggs were similar to chicken meat and eggs.

Anyway, I carried on with the cooking.

I used two large wooden skewers in place of chopsticks to stir the kimyusu egg.

*I had not made any pancakes since Reina insisted that I make them for her some time ago.*

It was back when we just entered middle school. My childhood friend Reina wanted to make pancakes because Valentines was coming and asked me to teach her.

After I told her to just follow the instruction on the box, she said angrily: "I came to you because I can't make it well after following the instructions on the box!"

In the end, we made perfect pancakes by following the manual. Reina just didn't control the fire properly.

And so... Reina decorated the pancakes she made with cream and chocolate and then gave them to me and my dad.

Reina started getting better at making desserts, so my father and I were relegated to just eating them. Now that I thought about it, even though Reina's culinary skill wasn't as good as my or my dad's, she was still really happy when we said her cooking tasted good.

*...Now isn't the time for reminiscing.*

I was thinking about Ai Fa and everyone in the Forest's Edge, and my thoughts went further back to Reina and my father, and the emotions almost crushed me.

I concentrated on mixing the kimyusu egg, karon milk, Jaguar sugar, and fuwano and cooking it in the pan.

There wasn't any baking powder, so the pancakes wouldn't rise. But thanks to the egg, I could make it into a yellowish and fluffy dessert.

I tried a little and found the texture to be mediocre. It wasn't fluffy at all and was too hard. But I had not eaten eggs or sugar for a long time, and nyuushi was used when cooking it, so the taste felt perfect to me. The sourness of the nyuushi brought out the sweetness without overwhelming it.

Anyway, I adjusted the ratio of the ingredients and made a few more samples. After thirty minutes, I made a pancake that was satisfactory to me.

However, I was cooking for a noble princess engrossed with delicacies. It felt a little underwhelming to serve this with just banam honey, so I used the aro fruit to make a fruit jam. I just needed to boil the fruit until it turned to mash and then to add sugar to make it into something similar to jam. I washed the fruit, added water into a small pot, and then looked towards Roy for the first time in a while:

“By the way, how many portions...”

And closed my mouth on reflex. Roy was watching me work with incredulous eyes.

He shifted his gaze away when he realized I was looking at him.

“...How many portions should I make?”

“...Just one.”

So Lifuria would be dining by herself. Dell and her father had probably left the manor for business.

Leaving that aside... What was with Roy just now?

*Never mind, it's better for me if we don't interfere with each other.*

I put the washed aro into the pot and boiled it with a small amount of water. The sour and sweet aroma of the fruit spread in the kitchen together with the fragrance of the nyuushi. I crushed and stirred it with a wooden spatula, and added sugar next.

The Jaguar sugar was brown, just like sugarcane sugar, but the grains were larger than white sugar and tasted stronger. It probably meant this sugar was full of minerals.

After adding a little sugar, I started stirring it carefully. When it was about to burn, I added more aro.

The fruit was rather sour, so I used quite a lot of sugar to counteract it. It still didn't taste quite right, so after putting out the fire, I added a little banam honey.

It looked like a gooey form of salted plum and wasn't bad for a fruit jam I made on the spot.

“Alright, this should do. But... I want to serve freshly baked desserts so I will wait until it's almost noon before making the actual product.”

“...Is that so? Then you can stay in your room, I need to use the kitchen.”

“Ah, you are making the dishes for the servants?”



Hence, I gave up my place.

“Ahh, before that, how much karon milk will be left for tomorrow?”

“Karon milk? Those are replenished every morning; the one here will be good for another two to three days.”

“I see. Then can I use a few bottles to prepare for tomorrow’s meal?”

Roy looked at me suspiciously.

“Whatever. But... Why do you need so much milk?”

“Because if I have to make dessert tomorrow, I will need to make a wider variety. So I want to make nyuushi-like ingredients ahead of time.”

After getting his permission, I took the two milk bottles from the food store and poured them into a pot.

One bottle was about a liter. I covered the lid and bade farewell to the white milky liquid.

“To not let it get in the way, I will put this in the food store.”

“...Is that all for the prep work?”

“Yes. If I let it sit, the water and nyuushi will separate, right? I plan to use the nyuushi part as an ingredient.”

The separated nyuushi was the cream. Normally, the milk sold in the market was homogenized to avoid the cream separating from the water, but fresh milk could be separated easily with this method.

By the way, by stirring the milk fats intensely, it was possible to get more concentrated cream, which could be used to make butter. I thought the nyuushi in this kitchen was prepared through such a method too.

There weren’t any refrigerators in Genos, and I didn’t know what are the other ways to make full use of the cream. But if I stirred it and added sugar, it could be used as a

topping for desserts. I thought about that as I carried the pot away when Roy came over.

“...Who are you?”

There was a strange light in Roy’s brown eyes. His freckled face also looked dead serious.

“Why does a brat like you know so many cooking methods? Aren’t you just a whippersnapper chef from the Post Station Town?”

“That’s true, but I’m not from Genos. I helped my father with his work back in my hometown.”

“...But you are just a punk! How old are you?”

“I’m 17.”

“17... Why is a juvenile like you able to cook so many dishes...”

“Erm, did you try my cooking?”

“...Lifuria-sama and the guests all said your dish tastes better than the vice head chef’s. How could I not try it?”

Roy looked as if he was going to grab me by the chest, but he stopped midway and slammed his fist on the working platform gently.

“The head chef went to the Genos castle together with the master. But the vice-chef is a first-rate chef who used to cook in the ‘Selva Lance Inn’. I know how good his skills are! But your cooking is better than his... How is that possible!”

“I’m a foreign chef. They must find my cooking exotic since my cooking is different from the chefs of this country.”

“Hmmp! We also invite chefs from Semu and Jaguar to work here often! But their dishes aren’t well received at all. But, why...”

“Maybe the people here just happen to like the taste of my hometown.”

Or maybe the civilization in my world was more advanced, so my culinary skill was ahead of their time. There was no way to ascertain these hypotheses, so we could only guess.

“I also learned to cook in the ‘White Dress Lady Inn’! I’m just 19! No one younger than me had been recruited to this manor!”

“Hmm...”

“But I can only cook for the servants. I’m still young, so the chefs in this manor don’t understand my skills yet. This is to be expected, but you...”

Roy started choking up and lowered his head. His shoulders were quivering.

“...Move that pot, it’s in the way.”

“Okay.”

I was surprised by him and did what he asked.

At this moment, someone opened the kitchen door from the outside.

“Asuta-sama, Roy-sama, what happened...?”

“Nothing! Leave, you slave girl!”

The guards cast sharp gazes at us from behind Chiffon Chel. They probably thought there was a fight.

“There’s no need to test for poison yet, right...? Asuta-sama, if you have finished your work, I will bring you to your room...”

“No need, I plan to finish right before noon. Can I stay here before that?”

When he heard what I said, Roy glared at me.

“I won’t get in your way. Please, let me practice cooking too. I was planning to practice at home in the first place. Will I get punished for using some of the ingredients for

practice?”

“...Whatever.”

Roy said with a hint of anger and started boiling water in two large pots.

I shifted the pot full of karon milk into the food store and then returned to the kitchen with some vegetables and herbs. I was curious about Roy’s culinary skills and stole a glance at him.

I didn’t have any chance to meet the chefs from the city, and I probably won’t get a chance again after leaving this place.

Since I planned to continue working as a chef in Genos, I should see how the other chefs cook. For the sake of cooking dishes in the Forest's Edge settlement and the Post Station Town that wouldn’t lose out to the city, I scouted out the enemy.

And so, I researched the ways to cook the various vegetables and herbs and observed Roy through the corner of my eyes.

As expected of someone who talked big, he chopped the vegetables and meat with perfect form. He sliced the chachi, pula, and neenon thinly and then tossed them into the boiling pot. Just how many portions was he making? It was a light lunch, but the quantity was massive.

He then added rock salt and the bouillon cube-like thing for seasoning and then put in a pinch of a shredded herb I had never seen before. That herb had a cress-like fragrance.

What surprised me was that he added some nyuushi. He split the palm-sized lump of nyuushi into two and added them into the pots. What a generous way of using them.

Next was the meat. It was red meat with lots of fat and weighed about 10 kg.

“Sorry, is this meat from the torso of a karon?”

“...From the karon’s back.”

Karon had the texture of beef, and my guess was that this meat was the tenderloin.

Roy sliced it 1 cm thick and then into squares about 5 cm long.

He grilled them in a pot greased with karon fats and put in another type of herb along with its stem. It had a spicy fragrance about it. When the meat slices were almost done, he removed the herbs and then poured the meat along with its juice into the pot of vegetables.

I thought he was done, but he left the simmering pot behind and went into the food store. Roy came out with two Totos eggs that were as large as rugby balls, weighing 1.5 kg each.

He placed the eggs on the counter and then removed a strange cooking tool from the wall. It was a metallic club with a thick head, about 20 cm long and 3 cm thick. I had no idea what use it had.

He started whacking the Totos egg with the thick end of the club. He was putting his back into it, but the shell only cracked a little.

When the crack opened to a certain extent, he placed the tool on top of the egg, and bits of the shell started falling onto the counter. What surprised me was that the inner membrane was still intact.

After removing a quarter of the shell, he made an incision in the membrane with a kitchen knife. The liquid inside was then poured into a new pot.

The yolk was bright orange and the egg white transparent. He stabbed the yolk a few times with a spatula and then poured it into a heated pot before stirring it.

Meat, vegetables, and Totos egg. A large amount of nyuushi and cress-like herbs. He stirred this mixture of ingredients and then scooped some up with a spoon to taste test. There didn't seem to be a need to season it further since Roy turned down the heat.

I thought he was done this time, but he took out another sack of fuwano, around 10 kg of them. His strides looked a little dangerous and unsteady.

He used a steel bowl to scoop up one bowlful, added water, and then molded them into ping-pong sized balls. He did this really quickly, and the counter was full of fuwano balls in no time.

After making about 200, he dropped them into the pot, taking care not to splash the soup. With that, he was finally done.

He covered the lid, waited some time, tasted the dish again, and looked at the tightly shut door. I asked at this moment:

“Are you finished? Would you mind letting me try some?”

Since he tried the cream stew, he probably won’t get mad at my request. Roy looked momentarily confused but then made a sour face before backing away from the pot. I stood before the stove with a new spoon.

This pot was cooked really well, but adding a large amount of nyuushi resulted in a layer of oil at the top, even after stirring the content. It had the aroma of nyuushi and herbs and felt rather unique.

I had a taste... And a texture that wasn’t bad spread in my mouth. The vegetables mixed with the bouillon cube, with the fragrance of nyuushi and cress-like herbs added on top, and the taste of the grilled meat also merged into it. Part of the Totos egg was mixed in, and the sticky texture of the yolk and the smooth feeling of the egg white felt really pleasant.

In short, this dish had a wide variety of flavors, but I didn’t find it unpleasant.

But I had not eaten other dishes similar to this, so I had nothing to compare it with. If it was up to me, I would have simplified these combinations. Nyuushi could be used very flexibly without fear of disrupting the nutritional balance. But that didn’t mean any combination would do.

Vegetables and herbs needed to be chosen carefully to achieve this texture, and this would take many attempts and precise control of the heat... I could sense the effort spent to make this dish.

“It’s delicious. I never expected such a combination.”

Roy made a complicated expression when he heard my feedback.

But he just clicked his tongue and yelled at the door with a: “Hey! The food for the

servants is done! Get the people on duty to come over!"

Chiffon Chel poked her face in and replied politely: "Understood..."

It seemed that the food for the servants didn't need to be tested for poison.

"...What about Asuta-sama...? It's almost noon soon..."

"Is that so, then I will get to work."

I placed the dough I made slowly onto the pan and cooked it in the same way as a pancake. I decided to make two fuwano pancakes 1 cm thick and 15 cm wide.

When the pancakes had a nice yellowish brown color, I shifted them to a white porcelain plate. I decided to put the aro fruit jam and karon nyuushi, which was a substitute for butter, into a separate small silver container.

"Well then, please let me perform the poison testing..."

Roy nodded when he heard Chiffon Chel saying that. He cut a small piece of the fuwano pancake and shifted it to a wooden plate, and then spread the three condiments on them. I felt that his actions were a sign of respect towards this dish.

Chiffon Chel carefully ate a piece then made a satisfied moan: "Ara..."

"It's very delicious... The banam honey goes well with this fuwano cake... And the taste of the egg is great too..."

Now that I thought about it, Chiffon Chel who had to test for poison was always eating the same things as her master. Even a mouthful of each dish would make her picky about food, so being praised by Chiffon Chel was a great honor.

"By the way, Asuta-sama didn't eat since last night... What do you plan to do about lunch...?"

"I'm already full from taste testing the fuwano, so I will just eat something simple later. Is it fine for me to stay in this kitchen and continue researching cooking?"

Roy interrupted with an emotionless tone: "Hey, this place is mine during this time."

He would probably be practicing his culinary skill here too.

“I will take care not to disturb you. Given how big this kitchen is, it won’t be difficult for the two of us to cook at the same time, correct?”

Instead of going back to that brick room and laze around, I would rather spend my time here. I needed to practice my cooking skills so I could make use of this experience once I was free.

Roy looked really unhappy, but he still said: “Whatever.”

## 2

Noon.

The ingredients for dinner were... kimyusu meat and eggs.

There was a larger variety of egg dishes than karon milk dishes that I could choose from. I decided that the best options out of all these possibilities were omelet and oyakodon, and decided on the former.

It wasn’t difficult to make the side dish for oyakodon in this place, but there wasn’t any ingredient to substitute for rice. I didn’t want to make something that I would regret.

So I chose kimyusu omelet.

It wasn’t difficult to make this since I had meat, aria, and nyuushi. I planned to make an omelet with lots of meat.

But this dish seemed dull, so I decided to work on the sauce. I thought of letting the princess try both the tarapa sauce and white sauce.





The white sauce could be made the same way as yesterday, so I focused my time and effort on the tarapa sauce.

I called it tarapa sauce, but it tasted like ketchup and had a completely different flavor from the white sauce. My goal was to try to make it as close to demi-glace sauce or brown sauce.

First, I fried the fuwano powder with nyuushi and made some roux. Unlike white sauce, I kept frying the fuwano until it turned brown. While it was cooling down, I made the stock that would enhance the flavor of the roux.

I diced a tarapa as much as possible and then used a grate to shred the aria which took the place of onions. I then cooked them with fruit wine and seasoned the mix with salt, sugar, Pico leaves, and bouillon cubes.

I was hesitant about using karon milk instead of water. The tarapa in this food store was sweeter than the one I bought in the Post Station Town, but I still needed to negate its sourness.

So I added the roux to enhance the thickness of the tarapa stock, and it turned reddish brown. I had a taste, and it had just the right sourness and looked good. This was thanks to the bouillon cube that could improve the taste of any dish drastically.

*If I rely on this too much, I won't be able to cook properly in the Post Station Town.*

Bouillon cubes were made by boiling meat and bones. It was an alluring seasoning, but making them would be difficult in the Forest's Edge and Post Station Town. The ingredient cost alone would be huge, and if I considered the time and firewood it would take, it wasn't feasible to use these in a business at all.

*I could get as much kiba bones as I need. If I could get the houses that had plenty of women to help, it might be possible to make something similar.*

I decided to stow this away in a corner of my mind.

Could I buy karon milk in the Post Station Town? And process them to make nyuushi and curd? What about the price of kimyusu and Totos egg, were there enough quantity for retail? If there were enough supply, why have I never seen it in any kitchen before? How much does reten oil, mamaria vinegar, Jaguar sugar, and banam honey cost? Also,

where could I procure them?

In just 24 hours, I had noted down these things in my mind.

*I can't just let the nobles monopolize this deliciousness. I need to learn from this disaster and make use of it in the future...*

I thought as I started making omelet.

This dish wasn't complicated. I cut the kimyusu chest meat into shreds and then fried it together with aria and neenon shreds. Afterwards, I seasoned it with salt, Pico leaves, bouillon cube, and fruit wine.

After finishing that, I poured an egg mixture into a pan. The egg was mixed with a small amount of karon milk, and I used nyuushi in place of fats to fry them.

Kimyusu egg could be eaten raw, so I decided to make them into a half-cooked gooey state. I added in the other ingredients before the egg hardened completely and then rolled the egg to wrap up the other ingredients. The "Tsurumi restaurant" also sold omelet rice, so I was good at doing this.

I scooped the end product onto a plate and then almost added tarapa sauce and white sauce on both sides... Fortunately, I remembered about testing for poison.

If the taste testing was done after pouring the sauce, it would destroy the presentation. It would be wiser to put the sauces in separate containers, like what I did with the fuwano pancake.

"I'm done. Please test for poison."

Roy cut off three slices from the right side of the omelet and then poured two types of sauce on them. Chiffon Chel moaned in awe after tasting it.

"I'm speechless... The dishes Asuta-sama makes are incredible... It is really delicious..."

I couldn't see the princess and Dell's reaction, so Chiffon Chel's evaluation was everything. But I wondered how Lifuria felt about a small piece of her pancake and omelet being cut off for poison testing. She had to eat these dishes alone when there were no guests and her father was away.

High-quality cuisine made just for her, which needed to be tested for poison... The ingredients might be top-notch, the chef could be the cream of the crop, but would the food taste good like this?

*...Indeed, being a noble isn't all good.*

Anyway, the servants took away the dinner in a blink of an eye.

I asked the guards if I could meet Lifuria, but the answer I got after sunset was a “No.”

“Today’s dish, too, wasn’t bad. The mistress said that if you continue to work hard, she will send you home with a reward in five days.”

“But I have my own life too! If not, let me make preparations to close my stalls in the Post Station Town for a few days. I will come back to cook after making arrangements with the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

My request was turned down.

The curtains I tore last night were taken away by the servants; they also took away the other curtains too, so I lost my means of contacting Dell.

*The only thing I can do is to cook...*

I thought about where things went wrong and embraced another lonely night.



The next day, 7th of the White Month, I was told to make lunch with Minmi fruit.

I knew nothing about that ingredient. It was the size of a tennis ball, with hair-like spines that were 1 cm long covering it, a strange fruit. On further inquiry, I learned it was imported from the southernmost region of Jaguar, an extremely rare ingredient. I timidly peeled off the disgusting skin and found the insides to be pink and juicy.

The faint aroma was sweet, and the texture was similar to peach. There wasn’t any sourness at all, only a strong sweetness. It was as juicy as a peach, and juices as thick as honey dripped with every bite.

*I think it would be best to eat delicious fruit as it is.*

I muttered in my mind as I experimented with the samples.

I could make delicious jam by mashing it up and adding sugar, but considering the texture, I decided to heat up the mashed fruit and then add in sugar, honey, and a dash of alcohol-less fruit wine.

I also had the karon milk I left to sit from yesterday.

After sitting for one night, the karon milk had separated into the cream and water layer. Even the color of the cream looked concentrated, and there was more cream than I expected.

At best, fresh cow milk contains 4 percent of fats. So 2 liters would yield at most 80 g of cream. But karon milk could produce twice that amount easily.

*I heard that buffalo milk had twice the amount of fats compared with cow milk. Speaking of which, karon curd was similar to Mozzarella cheese, so karon milk should be more similar to buffalo milk.*

Anyway, more was better. I skimmed the cream as carefully as I could and shifted it into another container. It was thick and white.

This was already good enough as a cream, but, to improve its texture, I had to turn this into whipped cream. So I shifted it into a smaller container and started shaking it up and down. There wasn't anything like a whisk in this kitchen after all.

Whipped cream needed air to get its fluffy texture, so I thought this was an effective method.

I learned about this method by chance. I heard that in order to make tastier tea, instead of using mineral water, it was better to use tap water with air mixed into it. If you really wanted to use mineral water, you should shake the bottle intensely to mix the air into it.

I made use of this theory, or rather, I did so rather naturally. Everything I knew about making desserts was from my meager experience and knowledge.

*I think Reina said that the cream needs to be beaten for 7 to 8 minutes when not using an electric hand mixer.*

Then how many minutes should I go with this method? If I go at it for too long, the fats would get separated into nyuushi, but on the other hand, I didn't think it would be that easy to make nyuushi.

So I decided to shake it longer than necessary. Roy who was watching me cook with eyes as serious as yesterday was already staring with his eyes wide.

I felt about ten minutes had passed. My muscles would ache if I shook any longer, so I poured the cream I had shaken onto a metal bowl.

The cream that used to viscous fell into the bowl. I poked at it with a wooden skewer in place of chopsticks and found it a little hard, but still acceptable. The cream was in the perfect semi-liquid state.

I then added sugar in it and started whipping the cream with skewers in place of chopsticks. Before doing so, I added water into a bowl one size bigger and put the cream bowl in it. As the cream would melt at body temperature, I had to cool it so it wouldn't revert back to its liquid form.

After whipping it for 3 to 4 minutes, it finally felt a little bit harder.

"Well, that should do."

I made another fuwano pancake that had less sugar compared to yesterday's and tried it. Next was the Minmi fruit jam.

Simply put, this was a weird combination of adding peach jam on pancakes, but since I wasn't that particular about desserts, it was good enough for me.

The whipped cream I made on the spot wasn't much, but the fluffy texture would probably feel refreshing to the people here. As it was made from karon milk, there shouldn't be any complaints about eating it together with banam honey.

So the dish I decided on was a casual dessert served together with Banam honey and nyuushi. From the face Chiffon Chel who tested for poison, this dessert was as good as

yesterday's.

*Without sugar and karon milk, I won't be able to make desserts in Forest's Edge and Post Station Town. I really want to let Rimee Wu and Tara try this.*

I thought as I watched the dessert get taken away and then stood before the pot I had left alone all the while.

"Well then, what should I do with this?"

When Roy heard what I was saying to myself, he stopped his work at hand and said to me: "Hey, if you want to get rid of it, tell the guards to get someone to come. Karon milk stinks once it spoils; there is a designated place to dispose of it."

"No, this won't spoil for another day or two, right? I'm thinking about what dish to make with it."

"...What dish can you make with the milk that had its fats removed?"

"Even without the fats, the milk still has plenty of nutrients. It's a pity to throw it away."

Milk with its fats removed was called skimmed milk. By processing it into powder, it would become skimmed milk powder. In Japan, skimmed milk wasn't held in high regard, but it was still sold in the market as an ingredient for making desserts.

However, it seemed unlikely for this world to have the technology to process milk into powdered form. If the method used to make bouillon cube was employed, salt would need to be added to preserve it, which wouldn't be ideal.

*In any case, I just need to think about using fresh milk. Maybe this isn't sold in the Post Station Town because preserving it is hard.*

My worries stemmed from my hope that I could purchase karon milk in the Post Station Town. I was practicing ahead of time so I would be ready when karon milk was available for me in the future.

In Genos which didn't have any freezer facilities, fresh milk could only be kept for two to three days. As for their usage, my main focus would be on using them as nyuushi or curd. From my experiment just now, I realized that 2 liters of karon milk could only

yield less than 200 g of cream.

It was more than I expected, but that meant that 90% of it would become skimmed milk. I thought the skimmed milk contained a lot of nutrients too, so I didn't want to resemble the nobles by letting it go waste.

*In the Dabag city where the karon are sold, there should be some way to use it.*

I would need to research this, but right now, I could only use my own judgment to decide on how to use this skimmed milk.

*Okay, let's see whether it could be used as part of a soup. Next... I think Reina made custard cream with it before. Let's make the preparation to try this tomorrow.*

I never thought that I would depend on my childhood friend in such a way.

With my heart aching from the thought that I would never meet my childhood friend again, I started on the work at hand.



I was asked to use kimyusu meat and curd to make dinner for that night.

She asked for kimyusu meat three days in a row, which showed how much Lifuria liked it.

*Kimyusu meat and curd... So a dish with chicken and cheese, huh...*

Since there was an oven, how about making a pizza? But there wasn't one in the Forest's Edge, so I wouldn't be able to put this experience to use in the future.

So I decided to go wild and make piccata.

This was an Italian dish made by frying meat dredged in flour and egg.

I had never eaten proper Italian piccata before too and only tried the imitation made by my dad. He didn't make this for sale but as supper or gifts.

He used chicken breast meat, so I decided on kimyusu breast meat too. I decided to



boldly remove the skin and cut it 1 cm thick, and then tenderize it with a stick. I used two slices for a portion, so there were six slices for three portions.

After seasoning it with Pico leaves, I stuffed crushed curd between the slices. The type of curd wasn't specified, so I chose the Gyama curd that was tougher and easier to crush.

After finishing with that, I cracked an egg. I used the grate to grind the karon curd into powder-like form and then added it into the egg.

That was the gist of making piccata that I learned from my dad; I wondered how real piccata was made. I heard traditional piccata used veal.

Anyway, I used fuwano bits in place of flour and sprinkled it onto the meat, then poured the egg-curd mixture, and finally grilled it in a pan. Grilling it with nyuushi would make the taste too strong, so reten oil should do here. Reten oil was similar to olive oil, and personally, I thought it was suited for Italian dishes.

With that, the main dish was more or less done.

I decided to use the tarapa sauce used for the [Kiba burger] for this dish. When I ate piccata back home, the sauce was also tomato sauce with lots of onion bits. The aria that had the fragrance of onion and the tarapa sauce meshes well with the grilled kimyusu meat.

I tried the sample I made, and the texture of the meat, egg, and fuwano bits mixed wonderfully with the chewy curd.

If I could make this dish in the Post Station Town, it would definitely be popular. I just needed oil and eggs to make this in the Post Station Town.

I could purchase Gyama curd from the Semu peddlers and figuring out how to make curd from karon milk shouldn't be too hard. The reten oil that I couldn't buy had to be substituted by kiba oil though.

And I had to consider if kiba was suitable for this.

Would the kiba taste be too strong?

I wouldn't know if I didn't try it, but I felt I could still make a strong tasting dish. A kiba piccata that tasted like pork piccata... I could wrap it in grilled poitan and sell it at the stall.

*But it is hard to fry food at the stall. It isn't easy to maintain a strong fire, and it won't taste nice if I leave it alone for too long...*

I thought as I worked on the main dish. If I didn't engross myself in these thoughts, I would break down from my worries about the future.

However, Lifuria didn't give any special comment today as well.



The next day, the 8th of the White Month, I received a complaint from the princess early in the morning.

She said that she couldn't stand 'eating the same thing three days in a row'. Basically, she didn't want fuwano pancakes anymore.

My complaints that I was an amateur in dessert making didn't reach her ears. With no other choice, I decided to try making cookies.

I only had memories of watching Reina make cookies and had less experience compared to making pancakes.

First, I added sugar and fuwano to nyuushi, reverting it back to its semi-liquid form. Fuwano powder was added slowly to avoid making it into a dough. I then poured in a little karon milk and kneaded until it was hard enough to be melded into shape.

I then placed this onto a tray with fuwano powder sprinkled on it and then used a thick stirring stick to roll it flat. There weren't any baking molds, so I used a small wine glass to cut it into round shapes and then used a knife to shape it into squares and star shapes. The dough I removed was flattened again, until I couldn't repeat the aforementioned steps any longer. The last bits were molded into a circle by hand.

It was time for the oven I had been ignoring to shine. I just needed to lit the fuel at the bottom to use it. To avoid burning the cookies, I set it to the weakest fire. Roy taught me all that, and the fuel in question was charcoal.

In the meantime, I turned the skimmed milk into custard cream. First, I added sugar to the kimyusu egg yolk and poured it on fuwano powder. After mixing them, I added some skimmed milk. From this point, it was the standard method of making cookies. When making western confectionery, flour, milk, sugar, egg, and butter were all necessary.

After the ingredients mixed with skimmed milk turned soft, I heated it up in the pot. When the moisture evaporated and the mixture thickened, it was done.

It wasn't hard to repeat the process, and the karon milk and nyuushi gave the dish a lot of depth, and the taste was impeccable. For an amateur like me, this was the limit.

At this point, the cookies were done. I tried one after it cooled down, and it was crunchy. It was harder to replicate this, compared to pancake.

The extra dough I made in case of failures was also put inside to be baked. In the meantime, I prepared more of the aro fruit jam that I made yesterday. Cookies were good enough to be eaten alone, but having custard cream and aro fruit jam would make it even nicer.

And so, I completed my task.

All the dough was made into cookies, and I made a whole bunch in the end.

"This dish won't spoil that quickly, so the leftovers can be eaten as an after-dinner snack."

I mentioned that, but didn't receive any reply from Lifuria.



The request for dinner that night was 'anything made with kimyusu meat'.

Speaking of which, there wasn't any specific request for lunch either.

Was the competition against the vice-head chef still ongoing? I had not spoken with Dell since the first night, so I didn't know what was going on.

But “anything” was a troubling request. With so many ingredients, there were a lot of choices.

In the end, I decided to try a dish I was still researching, which was “Kimyusu meatballs”, a dish I had been researching for sale in the <Kimyusu’s Tail Inn>.

I chose kimyusu breast meat and seasoned it with just salt. I shredded it with a meat cutting knife and then melded them into rod shape instead of balls.

The problem was what flavor I should make.

I decided to try a new ingredient, the kiki fruit.

It was a fruit I saw in the Post Station Town but had not yet tasted. It was one size smaller than a fist, light purple and shaped like a dried persimmon. It was probably sold as an easily portable fruit for travels, just like aria.

I tried the taste earlier in the day, and it had a slight sweetness, a strong sourness, and a unique texture, something like pickled plum.

I asked around and found out that dried kiki was preserved with a method from Jaguar, by soaking the kiki fruit in salt and fruit wine and then drying it over a few days. Many travelers were adding this into poitan soup, which was a surprise.

The pickle juice was suitable for drinking together with wine. It was spicy and salty and could be mixed into normal fruit wine, water or fruit juice. The kiki fruit that was removed from the pickle juice also had a unique texture.

And so, the kiki fruit was a precious ingredient in the Post Station Town. Dried kiki fruit was also used as a special seasoning in the kitchen of the city.

I discovered dried kiki fruit under complicated circumstances. I was originally looking for ingredients to give more flair to the “Kimyusu meatballs” back then. The dried kiki fruit was dry outside but moist inside. By crushing it, something akin to plum could be made, which would be a good side dish for the meatballs. I hoped to add this into the new menu of the <Kimyusu’s Tail Inn>.

However, this dish might seem too plain for this place, so I decided to make four meatballs for each diner, with different flavors for each ball.

One was made with nyuushi while the other — with Tau sauce. These were butter flavor and soy sauce flavor in my old world.

The third one was covered in the familiar white sauce.

I decided to put some effort into the last ball.

This was a standard method for seasoning in my hometown. A sweet and spicy teriyaki meatball made with alcohol-less fruit wine, Tau sauce, Pico leaves and sugar, with banam honey as a hidden taste.

But that wasn't all. I dressed the teriyaki meatball with the tartar sauce I made myself.

Mayonnaise was needed to make tartar sauce. Making mayonnaise was easy if there were eggs, vinegar, and oil.

Start by mixing the egg yolk with salt; then, add vinegar, oil, and keep stirring. That was all.

The key thing was mixing in air before adding vinegar. I had to spend a lot of effort on this since there wasn't any hand mixer, but I was familiar with this method, so it wasn't too much of a hassle.

The ingredients I used were different though. Reten oil was similar to olive oil, mamaria vinegar tasted like a cross between western vinegar and balsamic. Mamaria was also a deep shade of dark brown and turned a dark shade of orange when mixed with egg yolk.

The end product was great. The faint raisin taste of the mamaria vinegar seemed a little out of place but the taste of the mayonnaise was spot on. The sourness of the mamaria sauce had been neutralized, so the taste was gentler.

Next would be dicing cooked egg and raw aria and then mixing them together with the mayonnaise. After seasoning it with salt and Pico leaves, the tartar sauce was done. Covering the teriyaki meatball with tartar would bring out its sweet and spicy taste and give it a junk food feel.

“...It's difficult to test this dish for poison...”

There were three portions with four sauces each. Chiffon Chel was trying to suppress a smile. I could just make all the meatballs into teriyaki tartar flavor, but when I taste tested them within my limited time, I found all the flavors to be good.

It was a given for butter and soy sauce flavors, but the dried kiki meatball was unexpectedly tasty too. After trying the strong taste of the teriyaki meatball, eating the plain kiki fruit flavored meatball was very memorable.

Since there wasn't any way to escape, I could only make dishes to melt Lifuria's stubborn heart. I encouraged myself with this thinking and did my best to cook.

But Lifuria neither gave any comments today nor agree to my request to speak with her.

### 3

*Today ended peacefully too...*

I was brought back to my room after finishing my job, and I thought to myself as I looked out the open window.

It was already my fourth night here. Dell probably still didn't have time to leave the city. The situation neither improved nor worsened, as if this would be my new daily routine as time passed.

But Pyschkurewuss would return in the morning two days later. No matter what, this daily routine would come to an end. In any case, this retarded lifestyle would end tomorrow.

This day passed slowly. I cropped myself up in the kitchen, but my heart was filled with sorrow and worries.

*Ai Fa... What's on your mind?*

Whenever I remembered this name, my heart started beating erratically, as if my body was being torn apart. I realized just how much I was depending on Ai Fa.

*Why am I here, am I really standing here by my own strength, am I really living for myself?* I was thinking about things that I normally didn't consider.

Like a lonely existence drifting in the universe, falling into a deep sea of despair.

*I want to see Ai Fa.*

*And hear her voice.*

*And feel her body warmth.*

I started getting engrossed in these thoughts that were so intense that I felt like a fool.

Aside from Ai Fa, how were the others doing? The Wu clan which I was closest to, the Lutim house, Lei house, Sudora house, Fou house... a long list of them. And the people in the Post Station Town too, they were just a memory to me now. I was drifting in a place apart from them, thinking back of the life I used to have.

I focused on cooking during the day to stop myself from worrying about all that, but once I returned to my room, I was overwhelmed by emptiness immediately. No matter how much I researched my cooking, only Lifuria would get to enjoy it. Although Dell would get to dine too, just that alone wasn't enough to dispel the emptiness I felt.

I wanted Ai Fa to eat these dishes. I wanted the denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of the Post Station Town to savor them too. The skills and knowledge I obtained here would be displayed before them one day... Even though I cooked with this on my mind, I still felt very depressed when night fell.

"Asuta-sama... It will be bad for your health if you don't sleep..."

Chiffon Chel came over quietly. Her hands should be touching my arms and shoulders, but my mind was blank and I couldn't feel anything.

"Sorry, I'm not that tired yet."

"Is that so... But you can't rest unless you lie down, please go to bed..."

"...That's true."

Whether I was standing by the window or lying in bed, the darkness in my heart would still linger. Still, it was better to let Chiffon Chel feel at ease.

“...The master will return in the morning of the day after tomorrow... I can only spend time with Asuta-sama for one more day...”

“That’s true.”

“I think it’s a pity... but... it pains me to see Asuta-sama hurting so much...”

Chiffon Chel was smiling as usual, but her purple eyes had a troubling light since she didn’t know the best way to convey her thoughts.

She had worked here as a slave for many years. The toll on her heart was worse than for normal people, but she still had the capacity to think about others.

If she wasn’t with me, I would have broken down already. However... It was hard to fill the emptiness in my heart.

“...Sorry, I’m going to turn in.”

“Okay...”

Chiffon Chel slowly let go of my arm and closed the window. She brought me to my bed and then disappeared behind the screen.

“Asuta-sama, sweet dreams...”

“Yes, you too.”

I collapsed onto the bed weakly. Chiffon Chel extinguished the light, and my vision was covered in darkness.

My body felt like lead, but I didn’t feel sleepy at all. Maybe my mind was resisting the urge to sleep since what awaited me were nightmares.

*Nightmare... Isn’t this exactly a nightmare?*

If I could go home two days later, I wouldn’t feel such despair. But I would be facing



Pyschkurewuss. I couldn't trust someone with such a terrible reputation.

And, of course, if I wasn't released but was forced to face Pyschkurewuss, I would try my best to open a path to a peaceful resolution. However, once Pyschkurewuss learns of his daughter's rash actions, he might think killing me off would be the quickest way to settle this problem... I might not see Ai Fa and the others again and disappear from this world. This was the source of my fear.

I could stand living apart from Ai Fa for a few days, but it would be a life worse than death if I couldn't see Ai Fa ever again.

The last image of Ai Fa, of her smiling blissfully, was engraved deeply into my mind.

...I hoped that I could make it through safely until we meet again...

Ai Fa was looking forward to us resting together in the house. Our scheduled rest day coincided on the 8th day of the White month, which was today.

*...Asuta, don't let your guard down, and work hard...*

I didn't relax my guard, but got kidnapped by villains and couldn't return home. I wondered how angry and sad Ai Fa was... I caused Ai Fa to feel even greater despair and worries than me.

*Ai Fa...*

I twisted and turned, and couldn't fall asleep.

I heard a strange screeching sound... Like metal grinding on something.

Did the wind blow open the window?

No, the windows could only be pushed open from the inside, so there was no way for the wind to blow it open. But the door leading to the corridor was tightly shut. Did Chiffon Chel open the window?

But I could only hear the rhythmic breathing of her sleep.

I propped myself up to see what it was. And then... A black figure appeared at the

screen near the window. The figure was darker than the night, like a compressed form of darkness.

“What...”

“Don’t speak.”

A suppressed voice.

The youth’s voice sounded familiar.

Feral yellow eyes reflected the dim moonlight shining in through the window.

“You are...?”

“Don’t be too loud. It will be bad if the woman sleeping there notices.”

The youth... had the eyes of a wounded beast, and a hoarse voice of a boy said quietly:

“Can’t you see me? Even with this much light?”

My arm was held by a strong force.

My consciousness was blurry, as if I was daydreaming. I was pulled behind the screen forcefully. The window behind the screen was wide open, and the moonlight shone into the room.

Under the pale moonlight, I could see the fiery red hair fluttering in the wind.

“Geta... What are you...”

“Ask yourself that.”

The red-headed Geta said monotonously and let go of my arm.

“You look really lively, Asuta of the Fa house. How’s life in a noble’s manor?”

This was the first time Geta addressed me by my name.

The Marsala hunter with a youthful face, half a head shorter than me and wearing a cape made from spotted hide... The son of the righteous thief Goram, Geta. I couldn't get used to it no matter how many times I saw his body.

"H-How did you get in here? There are guard dogs and sentries... No, how did you know I'm here..."

"I told you to be quiet; there are guards outside your door, right?"

His delicate features were twisted into an unhappy face, and he glared at me with his yellow eyes.

"Didn't you open the window just now? That's how I knew you are in this room. I shot a clawed arrow tied to Fuibaha vines to the roof and climbed up here."

"No, that's not what I mean. No one knows that I got abducted to this manor, right?"

"...The denizens of Forest's Edge say the culprit is definitely the aristocrat Pyschkurewuss. I had not discussed this with anyone directly, but the one who told me the address of this manor is Michael of Turan."

I was surprised by this unexpected name.

"Yesterday, I saw a man who went to Post Station Town question the denizens of Forest's Edge. When that man returned to Turan, I caught him and asked for the address of this manor. That man... It seems that he used to live in this city."

"Erm, that might be so... But the city is surrounded by rock walls, right? Isn't entry prohibited without an entry pass?"

"If I have tools, I can find a way. You want me to tell you how I did it...?"

I didn't really care.

"T-Then, why did you come here?"

Geta's mouth became a slanted line when he heard my question. I sighed when I realized this youth could show such a childish face too.

“I came here to laugh at you... You fell into the enemy’s hands despite all your big talk. And also...”

There was a sharp gleam in his yellow eyes.

“The aristocrat named Pyschkurewuss who is staying in this manor is the mastermind behind the conspiracy you told me about, correct? I heard about it from the conversation between the denizens of Forest's Edge and Michael of Turan. And... I wanted to see how this manor is guarded.”

“...There are sentries and guard dogs here, you know?”

“Yes, but they’re not as great as you make them out to be. Pyschkurewuss is still so lax on security after all the things he had done, huh.”



A dangerous air came out from the youth's petite body. It was on par with the feral killing intent from the hunters of Forest's Edge.

"There should be more guards inside the building. With how big this manor is, just searching all the rooms where people are staying would be a pain. It's not that easy to search for a person."

"G-Geta, are you trying to... Pyschkurewuss..."

"That guy isn't in this manor, right? I heard the denizens of Forest's Edge saying that. Today, I'm just here to investigate..."

Geta then lowered his head slightly and checked me out:

"...If there is a way to expose his crime to the public, it will be the best farewell gift to my late father. It doesn't matter whether your plan fails or not, I will discern the truth and then wield my blade."

"Is that so, then you..."

"However, if he is not served the death sentence, I swear I will lop his head off. I mean it."

His voice was even and measured, and he didn't look angry at all. But I felt a chill running down my spine, which was due to just a fraction of the murderous intent Geta was emitting.

I stood opposite the vengeful youth in the dim room. This still felt surreal to me, and I said:

"...So you are just scouting this place out and were looking for me since I happened to be here?"

"Yes, right... I thought you had already been skinned by your enemies..."

He cast his sharp feral eyes towards me.

"You seemed to be lamenting your own carelessness, what a pitiful man. The denizens of Forest's Edge will be surprised if they learn about this."

“I have no excuse to refute you. Erm... Geta, how are the denizens of Forest's Edge doing right now?”

I finally blurt out the question I had been meaning to ask.

“They are fine. The Forest's Edge denizens are searching frantically for you; the Post Station Town is a mess.”

“Is that... so...?”

“In the beginning, they almost got into a fight with the guards. Right now, they are running around town, and the sentries at the city gate are ignoring them. They are busy investigating who abducted you.”

“..”

“Many of the people in town are rebutting the guards too, and the guards refuse to yield before their captain returns on the tenth day of the White Month. The guards are as frantic as the people in town.”

Since Pyschkurewuss' younger brother, the captain of the town guards, was also in the castle, it was natural that the town guards were in a mess. This was the result of Lifuria's actions.

Even if this commotion reached the castle, the content would just be “A denizen of Forest's Edge doing business in the Post Station Town had been kidnapped.” Since this wasn't done on his orders, Pyschkurewuss would just ignore it with a laugh. He would probably think any friction between Forest's Edge and the town would be a good thing.

“Erm... Do you know how my house head, Ai Fa, is doing...?”

Geta replied emotionlessly: “That woman, huh.”

“She comes to town every day. But no matter how I conceal my presence, she will always detect me, what a pain. I avoid her as much as possible, so I don't really know.”

“I see...”

Ai Fa and the other denizens of Forest's Edge, and the people of the Post Station Town

were searching desperately for me. Just hearing that ached my heart.

“...Speaking of which, you aren’t injured, so why do you look so frail?” Geta continued quietly: “I’m in your debt, so I will help you relay the message.”

I walked towards Geta.

But Geta backed away immediately, so the distance between us was the same.

“Geta... I shouldn’t be asking you this... But can you bring me back to the Post Station Town with you?”

“Hmmp. Can you hide your presence like a hunter? If not, the guard dogs will kill you before you can take ten steps.”

Geta shattered all hope with those words.

He then stared at my dejected face.

“The denizens of Forest's Edge won’t have any trouble evading the guard dogs like me. And since they know Michael of Turan, it might be possible for them to locate this manor. But they left you here for such a long time... They probably thought it isn’t worth breaking the laws to save you.”

“That’s...”

Geta covered my mouth mid-sentence and said: “Not so loud.”

“...Do I even need to mention that there isn’t any evidence that Pyschkurewuss was the one who abducted me? The denizens of Forest's Edge can’t let Pyschkurewuss get hold of any wrongdoings, and they can’t transgress the law without any justification.”

“But...”

“And the truth is, the one who abducted me isn’t Pyschkurewuss.”

I started explaining my entire ordeal to Geta.

Geta kept quiet impatiently and didn’t butt in until the very end.



“The culprit isn’t Pyschkurewuss, but his daughter... The child of a villain will be a villain anyway.”

“No, I don’t think we can make such an assumption.”

“In any case, the fact that you had been abducted to this manor remains a truth. I still think that compared to your life, the denizens of Forest's Edge place more priority on the law.”

Geta pouted to express his unhappiness. Seeing his naive actions reminded me of Ai Fa, and I sighed. By the way, his feline eyes and angry face resembled Ai Fa a little.

“The life of one’s companions is invaluable. Are the denizens of Forest's Edge a bunch of weaklings who don’t care about the well-being of their companions?”

“That’s not true. What the denizens of Forest's Edge believe in is the justness and fairness of the law and rules. They believe in that more strongly than the townsfolk.”

“Hmmp, so unlike the child of a bandit, they have pure souls?”

“No, I’m not...”

“Never mind. I have my way of doing things, and the denizens of Forest's Edge have theirs. I found you through my own methods, which is something the Forest's Edge couldn’t do.”

Geta spoke softly, but his tone was taunting. He suddenly leaned towards me.

“Now, a question for you. What message do you want to relay to your friends...?”

His face and tone seemed to be asking ‘How may I help you?’

I didn’t know what he was scheming, but I still nodded and answered: “Yes. I hope you can tell them exactly what I said just now. And also tell Zashuma about this too.”

“Zashuma...?”

“He is a townsfolk who provides aid to the denizens of Forest's Edge. He is the only

one who can enter the city freely. I hope he can inform Malfreed about this as soon as possible... Malfreed is an aristocrat who wants to uncover Pyschkurewuss' crimes, just like us. He's the son of the Genos landlord."

"I understand. Which means, you might get in danger if Pyschkurewuss learns of this first. I will pass the message."

After saying that, Geta's golden eyes shined suspiciously again.

"By the way, is there a Semu named Sangjura here?"

"Huh?"

"The man who broke my shoulder blade is the culprit who abducted you, right? That's what the wanted notice said."

"T-There is already a wanted poster in the Post Station Town?"

"Yes. I only saw the sketching. The man called Sangjura and an unknown westerner, the wanted posters of the culprits who abducted you have already been spread in the town."

So Neil did report this to the guards, and the content had been spread freely in the Post Station Town. Which meant... No one had told Pyschkurewuss and his henchmen about this. This was a ray of hope for me.

"That westerner is probably the bodyguard of Pyschkurewuss' daughter. Both his stature and voice are similar to the kidnapper. His name is Moose. Please, help me relay that to Zashuma."

That way, we could inform Malfreed about this once he was available. After that, we just needed to wait for Malfreed, the steward of the law, to take the necessary forceful measures... We could only tell when the time comes.

"I will definitely relay the message. With this, we are even..."

When Geta was about to leave, I called out to him: "Wait. I hope you can tell everyone that I'm fine. And... Please, don't tell Ai Fa alone, do inform the others in the Forest's Edge too..."

“...I’m not good at dealing with that woman and planned to tell others in the first place. Why did you even mention that?”

“Well... I think... if you only tell Ai Fa, she might come and rescue alone just like you did...”

“With no regards for the law and without telling anyone?”

Geta narrowed his eyes, and his eyebrows were raised in a weird way. He had a complicated face of shock and awe.

“...To think you will show off your lovey-doveyness at this very last moment.”

“T-This isn’t showing off my love life.”

“But, I think that’s how true tribes mates... and true family are.”

With that, Geta put his right feet on the window sill.

“Farewell then. We might not meet again... For the sake of your friends running all over the place, try your best to live past tomorrow.”

“Yes, thank you. Geta, I’m in your debt.”

Geta didn’t answer and vanished out the window.

I rushed to the window and saw his caped figure disappear into the darkness. The tools he used to infiltrate the place had already been retrieved by him, and it seemed that he just leaped down the window. What amazing physical prowess.

I closed the window and sighed in relief.

I could finally inform Ai Fa that I was safe. Not just that, the dark clouds in my heart had dissipated too.

*I have to walk out of here safely next.*

An unknown power burst out from my body in place of my unease and despair. Geta

shed a ray of hope to me as I struggled in the darkness.

*Ai Fa, wait a bit longer for me.*

I was a little worried about falling asleep while I was so hyped, but I lost my memories of what happened next and fell into deep slumber. There were no nightmares this night.

# Chapter 4

## The Day of Reunion

### 1

And so, I ushered in the 9th day of the White Month.

This was the morning of the fifth day since my abduction.

Whether it ended in laughter or tears, this should be the last day I would be cooking in this manor. Would it end with my death or reunion with my friends? I walked into the kitchen with the determination to meet my friends again.

Roy told me the instructions: “Make a dessert different from the one yesterday and the day before.”

What a troubling instruction. Aside from pancakes and cookies, what should I make?

“Hmm... I want to ask something.”

“What is it this time?”

“Is there any food made through frying in very hot oil?”

“Fried food, huh. That’s not a popular way to cook.”

“Oh, so is it possible to do that in this facility?”

I had doubts on how strong a fire the stove could maintain, but it shouldn’t be a problem if there wasn’t any need to conserve firewood. The problem was keeping the fire burning at a certain intensity.

*As a last resort, let’s try making donuts. I’m all out of ideas.*

I only knew that the ingredients weren’t too different from pancakes and cookies.

*Well, I will need eggs for this too.*

I added sugar and karon milk into kimyusu egg and then slowly poured in fuwano powder. I wasn't sure what to do with the butter, so I made three samples, one with nyuushi, the second one with banam honey, and the last one with both.

Next would be the oil. With Roy's knowledge and aid, I poured reten oil into a large pot. I wasn't sure about the price of reten oil; how much would this much oil cost?

This was followed by burning the firewood. I had to be careful not to make the fire too big. I was using tools I wasn't familiar with, so I had to be very careful.

Mid to big fire was more suited for frying donuts. When the oil started bubbling, I waited tens of second before sticking a wooden skewer in place of chopsticks to test the temperature. I was a bit worried that the material of this skewer being different from the chopsticks I was familiar with, but I could only gauge the temperature by the bubbles it made.

When the oil reached about 180 degrees, I put in a sample to fry.

After tossing a round dough in, it started making hissing sounds with no signs of weakening. As the quality of the oil was different, it was hard for me to tell if things were proceeding without problems.

I then added firewood as I put in more samples. Every dough I put in would lower the oil's temperature, so it was difficult to keep the temperature at a certain level.

Changes to the oil's temperature could be mitigated by using more oil, so this test run would give me a general feel of things even if it fails. The key was to keep the oil at a high enough temperature without burning the food. I stopped my test run after learning that.

*Hmm. I can fry things with kiba oil too, so this won't be a wasted effort.*

The taste of the dough with both ingredients added in had the most prominent taste, so I decided to go with this prototype.

And so, I started making the shape of the dough.

I could only think of four shapes with my limited imagination. A ring shape with a hole in the middle, a ball, a straight rod shape, and a thinner twisted rod shape.

I was worried about not cooking it completely, so I made all the donuts one size smaller. It was very chewy, probably due to the absence of baking powder. If I made the donuts too big, nobles who had weak jaws would have a hard time eating them.

So, what should I do about the topping? I still had some skimmed milk to make custard cream, but that would be too bland.

*Ah, I can just coat it with sugar.*

If I coated it with melted sugar and dry it, it would look and taste similar to the actual thing. Anyway, I decided to give it a try.

As I was just starting to fry the donuts... something big happened. While observing the color of the few donuts I added in, one of them exploded.

“Uwah...!”

Hot oil splattered. Not much of the oil flew out of the pot, but I felt that my life was in danger as I was standing right beside it.

“Hot! Hot, hot, hot!”

I pulled my shirt that was stained with the oil to keep it from touching my skin. Fortunately, my exposed face and hands weren’t touched by the oil.

“What are you doing, you retard!”

Roy threw a towel he dunked into the water flask at me.

I immediately inserted the towel between my clothes and chest and then looked at the pot. The donut that exploded was the ball. The others were still hissing and had turned into a nice color.

I quickly retrieved them with a chopstick and placed onto a wire meshing. The ball-shaped donut had turned into a weird form as it floated in the oil, and I picked it up

too.

“Ahh, that surprised me... This shape can’t withstand the dough expanding from the inside.”

I didn’t know the exact reasons, but I could only treat this as a disaster caused by the ball-shaped donut.

“I’m the one who is surprised! This is the last stretch, so don’t do anything dangerous!”

I turned my head back and said: “I’m very sorry”, and found Roy’s face to be paler than mine with his hand on his heart. That probably gave him a big fright. His sarcastic tone was gone, and he looked a little childish.

“Luckily, I made extra dough. I will be careful in my second run.”

“You want to do it again! Stop that!”

“It’s fine, it’s the ball-shaped one that has a problem. I will make them all into ring shapes.”

I scooped out the burnt remnants of the donuts out of the pot and carefully adjusted the fire.

As expected, the disaster didn’t repeat. The reason for the explosion was the ball-shaped donut after all.

“Really now, my lifespan was shortened by years from that fright...”

Roy was still grumbling.

He could be haughty at times, but this youth wasn’t a bad person.

Anyway, I made full use of the leftover ingredients and failed samples and also tried to make several types of toppings. The twisted rod donut and stick donut were topped with sugar mixed with a little banam honey, while the ring donut was covered with aro fruit jam and custard cream.

If there was more time, I would want to try putting the fruit jam and cream inside the



donut before frying it. But there was no telling if I could make dessert in the future, so I didn't feel too bad about it.

"Ahh... This also has an extraordinary taste..."

Chiffon Chel who came to test for poison looked very pleased.

Tonight's dinner would be her last chance to try my cooking. After Chiffon Chel and the servant serving the food left, I turned to Roy:

"Erm, if you don't mind, would you like to try some? I made a little too much."

"..."

"Because I used oil, so I'm full from just trying the taste. I still want to try the taste for my cooking practice, so I don't want to eat too much."

"I will try some since you say that... You are a little queer."

"Huh? Is that so?"

"Are you getting cocky because you can go home tomorrow? This is the first time you made such a mistake, but you look so lively."

According to Chiffon Chel, Roy rarely saw his employer Pyschkurewuss. He probably didn't know how ruthless Pyschkurewuss actually was.

He probably thought that Pyschkurewuss would just give me a large sum of money to buy my silence after realizing what his daughter had done.

I wouldn't need to work so hard if that was so, but I hid this thought in my heart and answered: "That's not true."

"The mistake was because of my poor culinary skills. I'm just a half-baked chef."

"...If you are half-baked, then how unbaked are us?"

I was a bit lost when I heard him saying that so directly.

“Well... Chefs need to be mature mentally, correct? So for me to challenge making desserts and deep frying food and fail, means I’m just a half-baked chef.”

“Even a kimyusu wouldn’t care about such a mentality.”

Roy said with his back turned.

“Such worthless emotions will pull you down. Chefs just need to think about cooking delicious meals.”

“Erm, aren’t feelings important in cooking delicious food, right?”

“...If those feelings make you an enemy against someone you can’t defeat, you won’t be able to be a chef anymore.”

He started getting agitated.

I wondered how many chefs there were in the Genos city. What were the odds that the first chef and the first former chef I met knew each other? That should be unlikely.

“I don’t want to cook in a heartless place. If I had to choose between tolerating such an environment and not ever cooking again... I would probably choose neither.”

Roy looked at me in shock.

When I saw his face, I was certain that my gut feeling was right.

Roy probably knew about Michael, the fate of the tragic chef, whose nerves in his hand got cut because he defied Pyschkurewuss’ orders.

What kind of feelings did Roy harbor as he worked under Pyschkurewuss? I wanted to ask but stopped myself. I didn’t think it was wise to discuss this on enemy grounds.

“Well then, please have a taste. I’m going to start practicing.”

And then, it was noon.

Roy who left the kitchen returned only after the third koku bell rang.

“You can make any dish you like, but you have to use kimyusu meat. But... You need to make five portions.”

“Five portions? Did the master return earlier than scheduled?”

I asked worriedly, and Roy shook his head.

“There’s a sudden visit by a guest. Probably the son of some noble.”

Even if he was a noble, as long as he wasn’t an ally of Malfreed, it didn’t matter to me. I sorted out my feelings and focused on the job so people wouldn’t find fault with me.

*Well then, what to do. Cream stew, omelet, piccata, and meatballs. What would be suitable for the finale...*

I felt an inspiration immediately. I didn’t know if it was an adequate finale, but instead of donuts, I was better at making another deep-fried dish. Fried chicken.

*So, Tau sauce replaces soy sauce, myam stands in for ginger and garlic, fruit wine takes the place of cooking wine, and fuwano substitutes for starch... Since shiru is an alternative to lemon, all the ingredients have been gathered.*

It was decided then. The servants almost disposed the oil I used just once, but I stopped them. I was just thinking about what to do with it. So in my last night here, I would finish things with a dish I was confident in.

*If I can make something like bread crumbs, I will be able to challenge making kiba cutlet if I get hold of some eggs. I will be one step closer to realizing my dream.*

I thought as I mixed fruit wine and Tau sauce together and added in myam shreds to prepare the sauce.

The kimyusu thigh meat and breast meat were already preserved with salt and Pico

leaves. I marinated them in the sauce I prepared. Since it was already covered in salt, I just marinated it for another ten minutes.

In the meantime, I started making the side dishes. I wanted to make it more presentable with some vegetables. But there weren't any suitable raw vegetables, so I replaced them by chopping some cabbage-like tino... However, Genos didn't have the custom of eating raw vegetables.

*Now, this is all the more reason to let them understand the tastiness of vegetables.*

With reten oil and mamaria vinegar, making salad dressing was a piece of cake. Mayonnaise could be used as a condiment too.

My mind felt clearer than yesterday, so thinking and movements were faster too. Geta might have relayed the message for me, but there might not be any drastic changes. However, I was still alive... Just sending news that I was well to Ai Fa and the others was enough to improve my mood.

*If the rescue still can't make it in time, I will need to use my glib tongue to convince Pyschkurewuss. I must think of a way to survive.*

I thought as I started making the salad.

I fried the diced myam and aria with reten oil and added a little Chitto. I shifted them to a bowl to cool off and started dicing aria and myam. I added them with a ratio of 7:3 into mamaria and reten oil, and mixed the entire thing. For the final touch, I seasoned it with salt and sugar.

I wanted to distinguish it from the strong tartar sauce, so I seasoned it to emphasize the sourness and refreshing taste. Chitto and myam which tasted like chili and garlic, respectively, gave it a spicy and unique flavor. I felt pleased by the flavor I made on my first try.

After making the tartar sauce, I went to the food store to pick out some vegetables.

Just tino shreds alone wasn't enough, so I decided to add aria and neenon. The onion-like aria was sliced thinly, while the carrot-like neenon was chopped into thin stripes. I mixed them together with the shredded tino in a bowl. I added more of the neenon that didn't taste as strong as normal carrot and ended up with a side dish that looked

bright orange.

After all the preparations had been done, the next step was to fry the cutlet in oil.

I shook off the excess marinating sauce, coated it with the egg mixture, and sprinkled fuwano powder on it. I kept the oil at 180 degrees, just like frying donuts. Making use of the experience I got in the day, I put in the kimyusu meat, and the delightful hissing sound of the oil filled the kitchen once again.

I observed the color of the coating as I scooped up the meat like the way I did back in my hometown. It had already turned golden brown. I would normally fry cutlets until it turned this color in my home and in the restaurant.

However, as the ingredients I was using were different, this color wouldn't be the best. I placed the fried meat on the wire mesh and waited for the oil to strain before cutting it into pieces.

In any case, it was completely cooked. So I tried the taste... The oil and meat juice that was still warm spread in my mouth.

Because I used the flour-like fuwano powder instead of starch, the texture was soft and crispy. Personally, I preferred the tougher texture of starch, but this cutlet was fried really well.

The meat was very tender, and the taste of the sauce was impeccable, just like the chicken cutlet from my old world. There wasn't any problem at all.

I was very pleased, then turned to Roy and said:

"Roy, would you like a taste?"

"Hmmp... You seem really cocky. I already said earlier; right now, fried dishes aren't popular in Genos."

"Is that so. In my hometown, this is a dish that isn't affected by fashion trends."

Roy carefully picked up half a slice of cutlet and put it in his mouth. He chewed with his eyes closed for a while before swallowing it. He then said with his eyes still closed: "...Damn it, it's good."

“Thank you very much. I will fry the rest of it then.”

I tossed the breast and thigh meat into the pot one after another and adjusted the fire based on how much the oil was bubbling. The five portions of cutlet were done in no time.

I scooped it onto a porcelain plate together with the salad and squeeze some shiru on it.

To avoid the flavor from mixing together, I put the salad sauce and tartar sauce into separate containers.

With that, dinner was done.

“...This will be my last time testing for poison with Asuta-sama’s dishes...”

Chiffon Chel who was summoned into the kitchen tasted the bite-sized cutlet with a fairy-like smile.

“Ara... This is the first time I tried deep fried food... It is absolutely delicious...”

“Yes, I like it a lot too.”

After finishing her test, Chiffon Chel bowed deeply.

“Alright, we will serve this dish... I will be attending to you until tomorrow morning... But I wish to thank you for everything so far...”

“I didn’t do anything that you need to thank me for.”

I only realized after saying that. She was probably thanking me for the dishes I had cooked.

She shouldn’t be saying that as a slave testing for poison, but Chiffon Chel was telling me that she wanted to give thanks in spite of that.

“...Are you going to spend your entire last day in the kitchen?”

After Chiffon Chel left with the other servants, Roy asked.

“Yes, I can’t afford to waste time; please allow it if it doesn’t bother you.”

Roy started doing his work without saying anything.

Normally, there would be five or six assistants helping to cook dinner, but ever since I came here, there weren’t any. Lifuria probably didn’t want me to come into contact with the people in the manor. Roy would cook the dishes for a few dozen people alone, with the side dishes made in the other kitchen by other chefs and their assistants.

The taste of Roy’s dishes was complicated. After asking around, I learned that there were restrictions to the quantity of the ingredients and seasoning. The food here was procured for the sake of the master, and the servants were just allocated the unused ingredients.

However, I was permitted to use the ingredients and seasonings as I pleased. I wouldn’t use much anyway, and if I didn’t make use of them, they would just pile up in the manor uselessly.

From my observation and what Roy said, his top priority was to train his culinary skills; cooking for the servants was just a side job.

On a side note, he basically didn’t use aria in his dishes. Which reminded me that Kamyua Yost once said that aria was food for the commoners and was seldom sold in the city. There was aria in this kitchen too, but Roy didn’t think of aria as an ingredient worth using.

*Nutritious and tasty, regardless of its price; this is an excellent ingredient.*

I thought to myself as I practice and observed Roy’s cooking.

“Are you making hotpot tonight?”

Roy tossed in the fuwano meatball with berries fillings into the nyuushi herb soup I saw a few days ago.

Roy glanced at me and muttered: “Erm...”

He then looked away and continued:

“...What can you make by adding fuwano powder fried in nyuushi?”

He was probably asking what dish could be made with the white sauce I used when cooking cream stew.

I crossed my arms and thought about it:

“Well, this dish needs a lot of nyuushi, and if the soup thickens, it won’t be palatable.”

In any case, not all dishes would taste good just from turning them into a stew. Roy replied: “I see” and then started stirring.

“...Your cookings must be well received in the Post Station Town.”

“Yes, it’s all thanks to the kiba meat.”

“Is kiba really edible? Isn’t it so tough that only the denizens of Forest's Edge can bite into them?”

“That’s not true. It is just a little tougher than kimyusu meat. It won’t lose out in taste at all. Whether grilling or boiling it, the taste is good in either case.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

Speaking of which, I might not see Roy ever again after I leave the kitchen. Was he chatting with me because he felt it was a pity?

*He just needed to talk normally with me right from the start.*

I didn’t really hate Roy either. He might be a little annoying and arrogant, but if I had known him under more normal circumstances, we might become great fellow chefs and friends.

However, there was one thing I couldn’t ignore.

“Erm, what do you think of people from Mahildra?”



“Huh? What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

Roy’s reaction sounded like he was just trying to brush it off, but, fortunately, he was just surprised by my sudden question.

“Well, I’m from another country and don’t really understand the conflicts between Selva and Mahildra. Do you think of the northerners as enemies and hate them?”

“That’s out of the blue. I don’t care about hatred; slaves are just slaves.”

“I don’t really understand the existence of slaves. This is just a question; doesn’t it hurt your conscience when using violence on someone you don’t hate?”

“...You really like making things difficult for others. Why are you asking me this now?”

“Because of Chiffon Chel, of course... I’m also acquainted with a mixed blood between northerners and westerners.”

Kamyua Yost whom I had not seen for a long time appeared on my mind.

“He isn’t someone I outright respect, but he has his charms... And I think he wouldn’t have such an unfathomable personality if not for the bias treatment he received for being a mixed blood. Frankly speaking, I don’t really understand the thinking of discriminating others because of their heritage.”

“But... Mahildra is also exploiting Selva citizens as slaves too. They are at fault too.”

“I’m not pointing fingers at anyone; this is just a question. Given how far Genos is from Mahildra, it’s hard to understand the logic of bearing hatred towards the northerners.”

Roy stopped his work and looked back at me with boredom in his eyes:

“Let me say this first, I had never whipped a slave before. The only ones who can do that are their masters, the aristocrats.”

“But you flung a bottle at her, right?”

“That’s because she was talking nonsense! No... Now that I think about it, she was saying the truth...”

At this point, Roy started shouting like a kid:

“What the hell, are you finding trouble with me during the home stretch? If you have a problem with me, just spit it out!”

“I’m not finding trouble with you; I’m just curious. I want to learn more about the westerner’s perspective of things for future reference. If I made you upset, I apologize.”

Roy shut up with a sour face, and I reflected on saying unnecessary things and decided to continue practicing.

The door then opened, as if someone was waiting for our conversation to stop.

“Asuta-sama, do you have time... Lifuria-sama is looking for you...”

The one who came was, of course, Chiffon Chel.

“She finally feels like giving her comment after having this last meal, huh. It will be great if she releases me.”

“No... It seems that the guests who visited today are adamant on speaking with Asuta...”

“Huh? Isn’t he the child of some aristocrat?”

“Yes... The second son of Count Taliem, Polarse-sama...”

To me, all the nobles aside from Malfreed were enemies. That Malfreed wasn’t really an ally either, but we could still fight on the same side.

“Erm, I feel like turning him down. I don’t see any benefits from getting involved with nobles.”

“You want to turn down a summon from a noble? He might not be like Lifuria-sama, but you will still get a lashing.”

Roy interjected with an unhappy face.

“He probably wants to give you a reward because he took a liking to your cooking. The second son of Taliem probably won’t give you silver plates, but he won’t make things difficult for you either.”

It seemed that the aristocrats in this city weren’t loved by their people. But I still couldn’t let down my guard.

“B-But, I was abducted here. Isn’t it strange to summon me to meet with guests?”

“Who knows. Isn’t it an honor to receive the compliments from the guests? Even if the second son of house Taliem learns about your situation, he won’t dare defy house Turan.”

Things were getting precarious for me.

“Anyway, since Lifuria-sama permitted it, you don’t have the rights to refuse. Hurry on then.”

And so, I followed Chiffon Chel and the guards down the corridor with a sigh.

What bothered me, was that Lifuria actually agreed to this.

*That little girl isn’t smart and might have agreed to it without thinking it through... Is she planning to hand me off to that count’s house?*

There was no telling if Geta managed to relay the facts to the Forest's Edge and Zashuma. It would be dangerous if I was moved out of this manor at a time like this.

*If that’s her plan, I will try to stay even if I have to lie.*

What a tragedy; I couldn’t think of a way to get help from Zashuma and Malfreed. I also didn’t ask Kamyua Yost about which noble aside from Malfreed might lend us a hand. Even if there was, I would need to wait until the next morning.

I thought as I walked down the maze-like passageway and arrived at the familiar grand door. The mistress and the guests seemed to be dining in that hall with the four statues.

“...Before you enter, make sure you don’t expose your name and identity to the guests

when speaking.”

I frowned when I heard what the guard said.

“I won’t say anything if you don’t want me to, but isn’t it rude to not state my name to the aristocratic guests?”

“...It’s not of your concern.”

The guard said monotonously and shouted at the door:

“The foreign chef has arrived!”

The door then opened.

Not counting the bodyguard Moose, there were five people inside. As expected, at the seat of honor was Lifuria. She was wearing the pure white dress she had on a few days ago, with a bib full of lace covering her entire chest. She hogged the couch that was big enough to seat four people by herself.

On her right were Dell and her father. Dell was wearing a sky blue dress that was plain when compared to the princess but also of high quality. She seemed a little lonely but looked cute with her silver hair accessory holding up her bangs. She didn’t even look my way and was pretending to be all prim and proper.

Dell wasn’t asked to leave as Lifuria didn’t want to blow the cover that I was hired by her.

In any case, this was the first time I saw Dell’s father. He was short but had a stout built, typical of a southerner. He had on a good quality collared shirt and western style pants. His hair and beard were both a very normal brown color and wasn’t mixed like his daughter. His stubborn green eyes left a deep impression on me.

Sitting opposite them were the guests visiting today.

One of them was a man with the aura of a noble.

His dressing wasn’t too elegant, with a cream-colored tunic and embroidered belt. He wore gems on his arms and neck; the silver accessories sparkled brightly. His dark

brown hair pressed tightly against his head. He was a young man who was slightly pudgy but not obese yet.

His skin was yellowish brown, and his eyes had a dark shade of brown. This was probably the second son of house Taliem, Polarse-sama.

However...

To be frank, I only got a good look of him much later. The moment I entered the room, I was captivated by the woman standing beside Polarse.

She was a young and incredibly beautiful lady.

The cloth around her breasts was embedded with silver accessories, and a sparkling piece of golden cloth hung down from her waist. Her beautiful legs could be seen through her high slit dress. Draped around her shoulders was a piece of shawl with complicated patterns, while the curves of her tight figure were clearly accentuated.

An elegant hair accessory made with silver and gems rested on her head. Two large crescent-shaped earrings hung from her ears, dazzling under the light of the chandelier.

She wore several rings on her fingers, and the thin silver bangles on her arms clinked with a clear sound. If she wasn't a stunning beauty, her dressing would probably feel uncouth.

She was absolutely mesmerizing.

In the 17 years of my life, I had never seen such a beautiful lady before.

And...

She had long blonde hair, eyes that were brighter than everyone else, and chocolate milk like skin.

"I was right."

The woman wasn't loud, but her voice was as firm as steel.

“He is my family member, Asuta of the Fa house. Since we have cleared this up, please allow me to take him away.”:

Ai Fa who was dressed elegantly said that regally.

## 2

“...What is going on here?”

Lifuria said on behalf of me who was dumbstruck. Her voice was quivering from rage and seemed to be on the verge of exploding.

“It’s just a small matter. If we gave the impression that we have tricked you, I will apologize.”

The young noble sitting beside Ai Fa said in a loud voice. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from Ai Fa all the while.

“It seems that this person is the Forest’s Edge chef abducted by villains, and that incident caused an uproar in the Post Station Town. If not for that, I would just be smacking my lips after tasting such a fantastic meal.”

“...What is going on here?”

Lifuria repeated with the same tone.

“I should be the one asking that, correct? Why is someone from Forest's Edge cooking meals in Uncle Turan’s manor?”

“I’m free to hire anyone I like to cook for me!”

“Yes, you are right. Be it Semu people or Jaguar citizens, you can even get someone from Mahildra to cook for you if you wish. However, since someone abducted by villains is being forced to cook in Uncle Turan’s manor, doesn’t this need an explanation?”

This frivolous and roundabout way of speaking reminded me of Kamyua Yost.

But his voice lacked Kamyua Yost's cunning and was filled with naive innocence. I thought that as I stared at Ai Fa.

"Actually, an acquaintance visited me today. She told me that Asuta of the Fa house seemed to be imprisoned in Uncle Turan's manor. However, she is just a commoner and has no means of confirming this fact, so she asked me for help... But I just laughed it off because that is absurd. But to think it is actually true."

"...Which means, you lied to me. That woman who claimed to have Semu heritage and a daughter of a wealthy merchant is actually a denizen of the Forest's Edge."

"Yes, she is a denizen of Forest's Edge, Ai Fa of the Fa house. She requested to come with me in order to confirm this... This might sound rude, but her beauty makes it hard to imagine that she is a denizen of Forest's Edge, right?"

"...So, does house Taliem have the guts to defy house Turan...?"

When I heard those ominous words, I shifted my gaze away from Ai Fa. Lifuria was still sitting on her couch, but the bodyguard of the enraged girl had put his hand on his hilt, as if he was responding to her rage.

"Westerner man, you want to deepen your crimes?"

Ai Fa's calm words kept Moose in check.

"Sketches of your face is on wanted posters all over the Post Station Town. There is another man named Sangjura too, who doesn't seem to be here."

"Who is it!? There shouldn't be anyone who knows this chef is inside this manor! Who snitched on me!?"

Lifuria banged on the table with her small hands. A few of the empty bowl and glass clinked in response.

"Dell! Are you the one who told the people in the Post Station Town!? You even dared to step foot in the dirty Post Station Town!"

"Can you stop picking trouble with me? I didn't say a word as you asked. But I don't believe that Asuta is here on his own accord at all."

Dell said as if this had nothing to do with her. She must be surprised at the sight of Ai Fa but had been pretending to be calm all the while.

“I didn’t leave the city for the past few days, so I couldn’t have snitched on you. Besides, other than Asuta, I don’t have anyone in the Post Station Town that I can talk to freely.”

“Yes, I can vouch for my daughter’s innocence. I took away her entry pass for the past few days, so she couldn’t have left the city.”

Dell’s father spoke for the first time. His voice was deep and firm, which matched his face.

“I wish to ask you something. If others learn that Asuta has been hired by this manor, it will agitate the denizens of Forest's Edge unnecessarily, so don’t speak too much of this... Didn’t you instruct my daughter about that?”

Lifuria ignored him and continue rapping the table.

“Then who!? I will lash the one who sold out her mistress!”

Polarse glanced at Moose and then said with a smile: “I don’t know either. Maybe it’s a loyal vassal who mustered his courage to stop his mistress from deepening her sin.”

He had an innocent smile that didn’t fear to antagonize Lifuria. The Taliem house didn’t dare to defy the Turan house, but Polarse seemed ready to oppose Lifuria.

“Instead of that, isn’t there something else you need to clarify? If news of Uncle Turan’s daughter abducting a townsfolk spread, it will be a big scandal.”

“Hmmp! The other nobles won’t dare sanction me!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure. The captain of the castle guards, Lord Malfred has been strict on discipline lately. Even if you are Uncle Turan’s daughter, Lord Malfred who holds the law in such high regards will...”

“Apprehend and then lash me?”

At this moment, Lifuria’s face changed again. An impish smile appeared on her face



that was twisted from rage.

“That will be fine... If that happens, what kind of face will my father make?”

The bullish bodyguard Moose said in a hoarse voice: “...I would never allow Lifuria-sama to be treated like that.”

Lifuria suddenly went into a rage:

“Annoying! Who permitted you to speak!? Shut your mouth, Moose!”

Moose lowered his head depressedly.

Ai Fa looked at Moose who still had his hand on his hilt and calmly said:

“We will follow the laws of Genos for the sentencing of the criminal. However, please allow me to take Asuta with me.”

“No! I will not let that man go before father returns!”

Polarise said troubled: “Uncle Turan? I think Uncle Turan would want to resolve this peacefully...”

Ai Fa glared at Lifuria:

“The other things don’t matter; I just want to bring my family home.”

“I said no! I must wait for my father to return...!”

The door on the inside opened with a loud creak.

A petite old man walked in under the escort of three buff soldiers.

“What’s all this ruckus... And, why are there unfamiliar faces in my manor...?”

It was Pyschkurewuss.

I finally saw Pyschkurewuss in the flesh.

I felt dizzy, what was with this night?

He looked just as Kaslan Lutim described him to be. A big head with a small body like a child, he was at most Lala Wu's height.

On his small body was an incredible piece of white tunic, with more accessories than everyone present. Just the space below his neck was sparkling with gold like a woman.

But his face was black as if he was ill, and filled with wrinkles. The head of the Sudora house in the Forest's Edge also looked like a monkey, but Pyschkurewuss appeared more vicious and sly and didn't look like a human or a monkey.

Like a tomato, the top of his head had chestnut hair that lacked any luster. Compared to his head, his face was much smaller. His sunken eyes had a sharp gleam about them.

A flat nose, pale lips, flabby muscles, and a stiff jaw... The more I looked at him, the more creepy I felt.

His face wasn't the reason why I found him scary. His eyes were brown like his daughter, and his piercing gaze had an intimidating obsession behind them.

"T-This is lord Pyschkurewuss... A-Aren't you scheduled to return tomorrow morning? That's what my father told me..."

"...I was worried, so after having dinner with the other members of the council, I returned first."

Pyschkurewuss had an unfathomable smile on his face. This was the smile concealing his true intentions that Kaslan Lutim mentioned before.

"Speaking of which, what brings you to my manor, Sir Polarse? Are you here because you knew I will be absent...?"

"I-I'm here because of some matters..."



Polarse stuttered vaguely, and Ai Fa beside him said: "So you are Pyschkurewuss?"

"It's fortunate that I get to meet you here. Pyschkurewuss, I'm in this manor to rescue my family who was abducted by villains. Polarse is merely helping me."

Ai Fa showed no fear no matter who she was facing.

Pyschkurewuss cast his poisonous gaze towards Ai Fa.

"You... look just like a denizen of Forest's Edge..."

"Yes, I'm a denizen of Forest's Edge. I'm Ai Fa of the Fa house. The three tribal chiefs already know of my actions today."

"..."

"You must have heard about a denizen of Forest's Edge was kidnapped by villains. For the past few days, Donda Wu had requested to meet you several times, but you insisted that this should be handled by the guards and refused to show your face... And all the while, my family member Asuta was held captive in your manor. What's going on here?"

"..."

"We are not suspecting you alone. There are some who think this is a vicious scheme to sour the relationship between you and the denizens of Forest's Edge. And so, we had checked all the places outside of the Genos city. But we couldn't find any signs of my family or the villains in the Post Station Town, the Turan region or the farmlands. So I planned to obtain permission to enter the city today, no matter what."

"..."

"But before we could take any action, I learned this morning that Asuta was held inside the Pyschkurewuss manor. So I came to confirm this and found Asuta here as expected, together with the criminal on the wanted poster. I also heard that the one who gave the order is your daughter... Do you really not know anything about this?"

Ai Fa's face and tone were incredibly calm, and her eyes had the angry fire of a hunter.

The two guards beside me gulped.

“The three tribal chiefs will not acknowledge you as a representative of Genos before we confirm this. This is the unanimous view of all denizens of Forest's Edge. Pyschkurewuss... Please, explain yourself.”

Pyschkurewuss wet his pale lips with his thick tongue and said:

“...My daughter Lifuria abducted a denizen of Forest's Edge...?”

“The ones who committed the act are this man and another man named Sangjura. I heard they did so on your daughter's orders.”

“Lifuria... The guest from the Forest's Edge said that... You didn't do something so foolish, correct...?”

“I merely summoned this man in as a chef. I have no reason to suffer any slanders.”

Lifuria said as she puffed out her flat chest.

Pyschkurewuss laughed without a word.

Polarse who lost his edge said with a cramping smile: “H-However, that bodyguard Moose is wanted by the guards; the news has spread to everyone in the streets. No matter whose orders he was acting under, this is an unforgivable crime.”

“Sir Polarse... Your father and brother are still enjoying the cuisine in Genos castle that we spent so much effort to prepare... Do they know about this?”

“Of course, they know nothing. I'm here to help on someone's request.”

“Oh... Someone...”

“I-It's someone related to Lord Malfreed. Lord Malfreed won't be able to leave Genos castle before tomorrow's morning, so I decided to bring the denizen of Forest's Edge Ai Fa with me to this manor. I wasn't burdened with any duties during this conference, so I was free to help out.”

Polarse's slightly pudgy smile had turned incredibly pale, probably frightened by

Pyschkurewuss' intimidation.

Before his sanity broke down, Ai Fa said sharply again:

"So, what about your reply? Donda Wu is still waiting for us to return outside the city."

Pyschkurewuss sighed softly.

He then slowly shook his large head:

"...Jimon."

"Milord."

A guard behind Pyschkurewuss stepped forth.

"Arrest Moose."

"...Will that be fine?"

"The son of house Taliem, Sir Polarse won't slander anyone without proof... I will take his word for it and investigate the truth later..."

"Understood."

The large guard named Jimon turned and looked at Moose.

In that instant, Moose jumped like a weirdly shaped bird. His heavy body landed on the table with unimaginable agility. The plates were crushed under his feet, and a bottle fell to the ground spilling fresh red liquid onto the floor. Moose curled his fingers into claws and pounced at Polarse.

"Hyaa!"

Polarse fell back in his chair with a shrill.

Ai Fa swiftly grabbed the arm of the pouncing Moose and then threw his back onto the ground. The floor was covered by a thick carpet, but beneath that was probably stone flooring. Moose screamed with the death throe of a toad, and his body turned stiff.

Lifuria said coldly: "Are you a moron..."

However... She had the sad look of a child whose precious puppy got hit.

"Is Moose the only one who needs to be arrested? Father, I'm the one who ordered him to bring Asuta of the Fa house to this manor."

Pyschkurewuss didn't answer.

His venomous eyes didn't even glance his daughter's way.

"...Investigate the truth and sentence him in accordance with the laws of Genos... I can't think of any other way. What are your thoughts on this, Sir Polarse...?"

Polarse answered while he was still on the floor: "A-Alright! I think this is a wise choice! It will be foolish to lose the trust of the denizens of Forest's Edge over such a matter!"

Pyschkurewuss slowly turned and said to Ai Fa:

"Well then, relay my message to the tribal chiefs of Forest's Edge... It is not my intention to deteriorate my relationship with the denizens of Forest's Edge... The mistakes made by my young daughter is due to my oversight as a father..."

Pyschkurewuss said as the corner of his eyes started twitching. Was he trying to hide his emotions... his humiliation?

"Which means, you are not involved with this incident?"

Ai Fa glared at Pyschkurewuss with her hunter's eyes.

"Of course... If I was involved in this conspiracy, I wouldn't have brought the person I kidnapped into this manor... After all, I'm hosting guests in this manor too..."

The guests he was referring to, Dell and her father, were cautiously keeping their peace. Both father and daughter had a strong gleam in their jade-colored eyes.

"Also, I told the tribal chiefs of the Forest's Edge earlier to let the guards handle this

incident, to have faith in the town guards and to focus on their own work. I did so because I was in the dark about this.”

“Yes... The guards in the Post Station Town did their work diligently.”

“I swear on the western god Selva... In all of Genos, the one who is most pained by this is me...”

These were probably Pyschkurewuss’ sincere words.

He definitely had set up all sorts of schemes for the conference six days later and wanted to get this incident over and done with.

“I see. Allow me to relay your words to the tribal chiefs.”

As Ai Fa answered calmly, Moose who was by her feet was tied up by the other guards.

Lifuria glared at her father with tears of regret in her eyes.

Pyschkurewuss didn’t even spare a glance at his stubborn daughter.

And then...

“Alright then; let’s go home, Asuta.”

Ai Fa called out to me. Just hearing her voice made my heart race.

“Ah, wait. I need to change out of these clothes before going back.”

This was the first thing I said after coming to this room, which sounded a little retarded.

“...From what I observe, you are that foreigner denizen of Forest's Edge doing business in the Post Station Town...?”

Pyschkurewuss looked my way for the first time.

His gaze was dripping with poison, which was enough to send a chill down my back.



This was probably the second time I saw such venomous eyes after my run-in with Zattsu Tsun.

“I had done something horrible to you... After the judicial officer passes judgment on Moose, I will apologize to you another day...”

Pyschkurewuss bowed his head with his right hand on his chest and concealed his poisonous gaze by closing his eyes.

“Wait! Father, you should try that man’s cooking! His cooking...”

“...Silence, Lifuria...”

Pyschkurewuss cut off his daughter with his eyes still closed.

“I’m very disappointed in you... Before I give you permission, you will stay in your room... You are not exempt from the investigation...”

Lifuria quivered in silence.

Pyschkurewuss opened his eyes with his back to Lifuria.

“So you want to change your clothes, huh. I concur with that arrangement...”

He glared at the guards standing on either side of the door behind them.

“I will go with you. But before that, can you please return the blades I left for your safekeeping. Will that be fine?”

When Ai Fa said that, under Pyschkurewuss’ watchful gaze, a guard brought over a beautiful sword from another room.

Ai Fa accepted the blades Polarse proffered in turn to her and tied it to her waist. At the sight of her, Pyschkurewuss smiled creepily.

“As expected of a hunter from Forest's Edge... No matter how elegant your clothes are, the air about you is completely different...”

He was admonishing the guards who granted her entry, in a roundabout way. The

guards beside me all looked pale.

“Alright then, send my regards to the tribal chiefs of Forest's Edge... I plan to present my explanation tomorrow afternoon, could you please pass the message...?”

“Tomorrow afternoon, got it. Ah, there’s one more thing.”

Ai Fa stopped and looked at Pyschkurewuss.

“We have searched everywhere outside the Genos city in these four days, but we still didn’t find the man named Sangjura. He is the accomplice of Moose, so I hope you can apprehend him.”

“...Very well...”

Pyschkurewuss nodded firmly, while Lifuria’s shoulder shivered. And finally, Dell who was watching us worriedly disappeared behind the closed door.

And then we walked down the brick corridor, guided by Chiffon Chel and the guards. Ai Fa was walking beside me, and this still felt surreal. When we reached the room, I said to Chiffon Chel:

“Ern, can you leave the both of us alone while I change my clothes?”

The guards agreed to my request on Chiffon Chel’s behalf, so Ai Fa and I entered the room.

I then faced Ai Fa once again.

This was Ai Fa.

She was wearing clothes I had never seen before, but, still, she was Ai Fa.

Ai Fa who was wearing a dress more exquisite than the banquet attire in Forest's Edge, but she looked at me with her usual majestic face.

“Ai Fa...”

I called her name.

Was I dreaming?

Ai Fa's face didn't change, and she slowly checked me out.

She asked emotionlessly: "...Are you hurt?"

"No, as you can see, I'm at the peak of health."

"...Is that so."

I had so much to say to her.

*Sorry for making you worry, are you alright, things like that...* These words were on the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed them back.

"Ai Fa, I..."

In any case, I had to apologize and thank her.

With a floaty feeling in my heart, I tried with all my might to talk to Ai Fa, but she cut me off with a raised hand.

Ai Fa looked at me quietly.

The next moment... transparent liquid seeped out of her blue eyes, which shocked me.

I stood speechlessly before her, as tears flowed down her brown cheeks.

Ai Fa's face suddenly twisted into a mess, like the crying face of a kid.

"Asuta..."

She called my name once again and then hugged me. She buried her face on my shoulders and cried out loud.

Her tears wet my clothes, and I could feel her warmth.

Ai Fa's warmth that I had not felt for days.

When I realized it, I was already holding Ai Fa tightly.

“I’m sorry, Ai Fa... I’m really sorry.”

Ai Fa kept crying without answering. I was using a lot of strength, but her body seemed to be slipping down, so I held her even tighter.

Ai Fa sobbed as she said: “Asuta... You big dummy...”

And so, we met again after being apart for four days.



“When Lord Pyschkurewuss showed up, I was panicking, so it’s great that things ended well!”

Polarse recounted in the Totos carriage.

The carriage was a wooden box type, so there was no need to worry about people eavesdropping on us.

“News probably reached Lord Pyschkurewuss’ ears when the conference in the castle ended. If not for that, he wouldn’t have cut short the dinner that was so important to him and rushed back to his manor. Speaking of which, that Zashuma person was correct in asking us to come right away instead of waiting until the next day!”

After Polarse was liberated from Pyschkurewuss’ intimidating pressure, he seemed a little hyped up.

However, I had no idea of his character or motives. From the way he said ‘that Zashuma person’, he probably didn’t know Zashuma well.

“Yes. I’m just acquainted with Kamyua. I heard about Zashuma from him. Kamyua wants me to treat Zashuma’s words as his own.”

“Ah, then I was saved thanks to Kamyua.”

“Yes, that’s right. He is a cheery type, the stories of his travels are interesting, and he doesn’t fawn on the nobles either. Even that stone headed Malfreed is no match for him.”

Polarse didn’t seem to put on airs like a noble, but I couldn’t make that conclusion after only speaking with him this much. In any case, he gave me the impression that he had an aura of innocence and acted exactly as he thought.

Ai Fa kept quiet politely, and only Polarse’s and my voice reverberated in the carriage.

“I didn’t think I’ll get involved in a troublesome matter though. Defying Pyschkurewuss means they might do something to us! But, this is a fight of a lifetime!”

"I'm really very grateful. If no one helped me, I didn't know what would have happened to me."

"Don't mention it! I'm just the second son of a noble, and it isn't anything special! If I don't step up in such situations, I will be living in the shadows for the rest of my life!"

Polarse said as he leaned his blushed face towards me. His head was swaying along with the rocking carriage.

"In any case, we will be in the same boat from now on! Let's help each other and create a bright future! Asuta of the Fa house, I have great expectations of you!"

"Huh? Y-Yeah."

Just what was he expecting?

He saved me from a desperate situation, so I intended to help him without any reservation... I still didn't really understand the situation, so I felt a little uneasy.

"Never mind, let's discuss the details next time. We are almost at the gate; you can see your friends you missed so much again!"

The carriage had traveled for around ten minutes, but I couldn't see the scenery of the city because of the curtain covering the window.

"Ah, but isn't the drawbridge withdrawn at night, so we can't leave the city?"

"It's fine! I'm a direct relative of house Taliem after all! The second son doesn't have much influence, but they will still show me some respect!"

"Is that so; I'm very grateful."

Ai Fa was right beside me, but I should show everyone that I was safe. Uncle Dora and the others should have gone home, but I still needed to greet the innkeepers and make a trip to the Wu clan village.

Polarse turned towards Ai Fa and said: "By the way, Ai Fa-sama, what should we do about the clothes and accessories I lent to you? There isn't any place to change from

here until the gates.”

He neither showed fear towards the denizens of Forest's Edge nor looked at Ai Fa with lecherous eyes. I felt relieved about that.

“Can I return them to you tomorrow? My own clothes are with my tribemates, and I’m reluctant to change inside the carriage.”

“Yes, you might be a hunter of Forest's Edge, but you are also a young lady! I don’t mind, but I took this out from my house, so it will be a pain if I lose even a single ring.”

“I understand, I will be careful.”

“Yes, please!”

Polarse was really happy, while Ai Fa was expressionless.

Ai Fa regained her calm with her steel-like mental tenacity. The corners of her eyes were slightly red, but no one could notice under the dim lantern light.

The carriage finally stopped, and the driver spoke through the small window: “...Sir Polarse, we are at the gate.”

“Yes!”

Polarse answered energetically and then exited the carriage.

He was probably speaking to the guards at the gate. A few minutes later, a guard armed with a spear made a show of checking the inside of the carriage.

“Two passengers on board, check complete. Only the two passengers will leave the city, correct?”

“Yes! Go on, lower the drawbridge!”

The carriage was escorted by three guards mounted on Totos, but after leaving the gate, only Ai Fa and I would go back.

*Wait, isn't Donda Wu and the others standing by outside the gate?*



After causing such a big scandal, how badly would they lecture me? I felt blessed that I could worry about such things.

“Go, and return triumphantly!”

I thought Polarse was going off topic, but in a sense, this was a new starting point for me.

Creak, creak, creak... The dull sound of the drawbridge being lowered could be heard, and the carriage started moving again. It stopped less than ten seconds later.

“We are here. It looks safe, but please be careful during your trip back. Send my regards to the tribal chiefs of the Forest's Edge!”

Ai Fa and I thanked him and got off the carriage.

We were still on the bridge, but it was 4 to 5 meters wide and had chest level fencing on both sides. Since this was a drawbridge, the other side of the fence was probably a deep moat.

The carriage opened on the back, so I saw the city wall when I got off.

The rock wall was about two stories tall, which was around 6 to 7 meters. The sun had completely set, but the bonfire burning on several spots of the wall allowed me to see it in its entirety.

The gate was a black hole on the wall. There should be guards patrolling there with torches, as I could see light wavering in the darkness.

I looked around me and could see sparse lights at the far end of the walls too. This sturdy rock wall protected the heart of Genos, where the nobles and wealthy lived in the city.

*Geta is really something to have scaled this wall.*

As I was thinking about that, Polarse who stayed in the carriage waved at us:

“Well then, let’s meet again in a few days! Blessings on house Taliem and the denizens

of Forest's Edge!"

The three Totos riders and the carriage turned around gracefully and went back the way they came.

I looked out the city, and an unexpected scene entered my field of vision.

At the same time, a loud cheer erupted.

"W-What happened...?"

It was a deafening cheer of joy.

On the other end of the bridge were dozens of people awaiting our return.

"Asuta...!"

"It's Asuta! Asuta is really back!"

I could finally make out what they were saying.

"Let's go. The guards will feel uneasy if they don't raise the drawbridge."

Ai Fa grabbed my arm and started walking in large strides. I still couldn't grasp the situation as she dragged me along.

"...Asuta!"

A figure ran out of the crowd and embraced me. She was a petite Forest's Edge girl with long raven hair tied up into braids... Leina Wu.

"Asuta, I'm so glad that you are safe...!"

Tears fell onto the shirt of the Forest's Edge attire I just changed into. But Ai Fa didn't stop pulling my arm, so I could only continue walking while holding onto Leina Wu.

"Asuta! Are you alright!? Did the nobles do anything weird to you!?"

After getting off the bridge, a bulky man grabbed me. As the drawbridge behind me

raised with creaking noises, I yelled in surprise:

“U-Uncle Dora? Why are you here?”

“You are asking me that!? You are really...”

Uncle Dora wailed.

Tara who was laughing in tears shouted: “It’s Asuta onii-chan!”

Ai Fa explained to me calmly: “News that I went into the city with the help of a noble has already spread to the people we knew in the Post Station Town. They were told to not discuss this before dusk, to avoid any troubles with the guards. To stop Pyschkurewuss and his daughter from brushing this matter off, this was a necessary measure...”

“And so, everyone came to the gate to wait after the sunset. There is nothing to be alarmed of. Everyone... was worried about you, Asuta.”

Half of them were denizens of Forest's Edge, while the other— the townsfolk of the Post Station Town. Everyone was tinted orange because of the orange light of the torches.

Most of them were cheering, while the rest were in tears.

There was Shela Wu.

Lala Wu.

Vena Wu.

Rii Sudora.

Milano Mast.

Neil.

Naudiz.

Yumi.

And many others who I didn't know the name of.

Two small-sized youths walked slowly out of the crowd.

They were Ludo Wu and Shin Wu.

"Asuta... You are fine."

Ludo Wu gave a big sigh of relief.

"That's great; I won't need to regret my foolishness for the rest of my life."

I thought he would be disappointed in me, but Ludo Wu just muttered: "...I give thanks to the forest." This was the first time I saw this youth act so strangely.

Next was Shin Wu.

"Asuta..."

Shin Wu walked over with unsteady steps. When she noticed him, Leina Wu left my side while still in tears.

The ever calm Shin Wu grabbed my shoulders, and tears flowed out of his narrow eyes.

"Shin Wu..."

"Sorry... I wasn't strong enough..."

Shin Wu who was a little shorter than me hugged me like Leina Wu did and cried. A man from the Forest's Edge was crying in public.

I wanted to cry too because I felt that I let him down and burdened this youth with so much guilt.

"It's fine, It's also my fault for not protecting myself properly. Shin Wu, don't worry too much about this."

However, Shin Wu continued to sob. A while later, Lala Wu walked over without any reservation and patted his back.

“It’s fine now, right? If you are still so whimsical tomorrow, I will get mad, okay?”

Lala Wu then smiled at me.

“It’s wonderful that you’re alright. Asuta, you look lively.”

“Yes, thank you, Lala Wu.”

Lala Wu was smiling as usual, but her eyes were red.

The townsfolk from the Post Station Town swarmed in from behind her.

Milano admonished me with a scary expression: “Even my daughter managed to get away; how can you get abducted by the villains, retard?”

Yumi had a complicated expression on her face as she smiled.

“Asuta... It’s my fault for being careless... I really don’t know how to apologize.”

Neil looked like he was about to cry, and this was the first time I saw the innkeeper who had the principle of not showing any emotions losing his composure.

“Anyway, the important thing is that you are safe.”

Naudiz said to him while looking a little scared of the denizens of Forest's Edge who were cheering loudly.

That’s right, both the denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of Post Station Town were celebrating my return. This scene felt strange to me too; I never expected people like Neil and Milano Mast could get along so well with the denizens of Forest's Edge. They were standing at my side because they shared the same feelings.

My stupidity led to me falling into the hands of the nobles, and I couldn’t do anything except wait for help. They welcomed a fool like me with laughter and tears, and there were some who even got mad at me.

The group of southerners laughing with fruit vine bottles in their hands were definitely the construction workers who helped Uncle Balan sometime before.

As usual, the easterners hid their facial expression with their hoods. The westerners were the minority here, with just twenty-odd people. I saw regulars at my stall, the cloth shop uncle and my pot dealer.

The denizens of Forest's Edge who matched them in numbers chatted together with them and waved their torches around. There were men and women, familiar faces and people I hardly saw. But all of them had happy and strong expressions on their faces.

If I looked closely, I could see tens of spear-bearing guards surrounding this group. This was probably an uproar that might infringe on the laws of Genos.

I didn't know what to do and just stood stiffly in place... A short moment later, three figures approached me, as if they couldn't bear this unsightly scene anymore.

Two of the figures were huge, while the other was smaller. The trio was Donda Wu, Kaslan Lutim, and Rau Lei.

"Asuta, it's great that you are safe."

First was Kaslan Lutim who clasped my hands tightly.

"Even Kaslan Lutim... I'm sorry for making you worry."

"No need to apologize; I'm happy that Asuta is well."

Kaslan Lutim showed a steady smile.

Rau Lei who was beside me leaned his face towards me.

"Really now, Asuta, you had me worried there. We were really close to clashing arms with the nobles. Oh well, it was quite interesting too."

Rau Lei was the same as usual. He smiled as his blue eyes had the sharp gleam of a hunting dog.

"For the past few days, we had been running around the Post Station Town from

morning until dusk, you know? It won't be worth it if you don't cook a good meal for us."

"Yes, sorry, I will cook as much as you like."

"You retard, that's a joke. It's only natural to run around for the sake of a fellow tribemate."

Rau Lei reached out his hand and ruffled my hair.

Next was Donda Wu.

Donda Wu looked at me with his beast-like eyes and then grunted:

"You don't look hurt. We will talk after going back to the Forest's Edge."

Before I could answer, Donda Wu walked towards the crowd, and his voice then boomed like thunder.

"Asuta of the Fa house has returned safely from the noble's manor! My apologies for the inconvenience we caused in the Post Station Town for the past five days! I, Donda Wu, one of the tribal chiefs of the Forest's Edge, offer my most sincere apologies to everyone!"

Everyone in the Post Station Town stood still and listened quietly.

But they quickly straightened themselves and erupted into cheers.

"That's great, Asuta!"

"Let us taste your delicious dishes again!"

"If you get tired of the Post Station Town and shut yourself in the Forest's Edge, we will visit you in the Forest's Edge!"

I was filled with complicated feelings and wasn't sure how to answer.

So I bowed deeply with all sorts of emotions in my heart.

I had finally returned to the people that I cherished.



# Epilogue

## Confession

“Huh! So the denizens of Forest's Edge went to search for me in town every day!?”

I asked Ai Fa inside a vacant house in the Wu clan village. Ai Fa who had changed into her Forest's Edge attire nodded as she let down her blonde hair.

I listened to a detailed report of the past five days in the Wu clan main house. Ai Fa was eager to go home, but Donda Wu ordered her to stay in the Wu clan village to prepare for the retaliation against the nobles.

Aside from Darum Wu who was away, everyone had gathered in the Wu clan main house, even Grandma Jiba was up at this late hour. Rimee Wu didn't take part in the search due to her tender age; she was laughing with tears in her eyes and refused to leave my side.

The branch house members also took turns to visit the main house and left reluctantly... Dan Lutim even rushed over from the Lutim village, making this feel just like that wedding.

“I'm very sorry, my father Dan was very worried about Asuta's safety... However, I didn't let him take part in the search in the Post Station Town, so he feels really melancholic.”

After that, Kaslan Lutim told me quietly about these behind-the-scenes matters. Dan Lutim and Jiza Wu stayed behind in Forest's Edge during this period and took charge of their kin.

“Anyways, half of our kin visited the Post Station Town every day, so the burden on those staying behind was very heavy.”

The men of the Wu kin were resting during the hunting offseason. But it would be reckless to send them all to the town, so 30 of each gender were chosen as the search team. The rest of the men guarded against possible enemy attacks and did household

chores alongside the women.

They also felt that the search wouldn't proceed smoothly if only the brutish men participated since it was necessary to interact with the townsfolk and guards when investigating my whereabouts and the identity of the villains. So they came up with the method of pairing the men with women to avoid agitating the townsfolk while ensuring their own safety.

And, of course, the one who formulated this plan was Kaslan Lutim. He then took part in the search of the Post Station Town as the delegate of the tribal chief Donda Wu.

"I really can't thank you enough..."

I said quietly to him with all sorts of thoughts in my mind, but Ai Fa just said coldly: "What are you saying?"

"If a tribemate is in danger, it's only natural to render aid without reservation. Won't you help the other tribemates if they are in danger too, Asuta?"

"Of course, how can I not do so?"

"Then don't feel bothered by this. Just your thoughts of gratitude are enough."

Ai Fa flicked aside her loose hair with a calm expression.

By the way, it was difficult for me to imagine the sight of 60 denizens of Forest's Edge running around the Post Station Town from dawn till dusk. Was there really no friction or run-in with the guards and townsfolk?

"There's no problem. Our goal wasn't to disrupt the public order of the Post Station Town; we just wanted to search for the whereabouts of you and the villains. In the beginning, the guards kept yammering that the denizens of Forest's Edge should scam on back to Forest's Edge, but after Donda Wu roared at them, questioning if they could find Asuta with just them alone, the guards backed off."

"Oh, I see..."

"The kin of the Wu clan are also resting in the offseason, as Kaslan Lutim explained earlier. The other houses were also worried about Asuta, but they just had to perform

their duties as hunters through gritted teeth. We then visited the Post Station Town on their behalf and strived to be acknowledged for this.”

Ai Fa then sighed softly:

“However, I didn’t prioritize my duty as a hunter. Fortunately, no one blamed me for that.”

“Yes, I’m really...”

“Annoying. You don’t need to apologize to me. And so... Aside from the guards, the townsfolk settled down after two days. Leina Wu’s efforts in running the stall probably played a part too.”

“Oh, so Leina Wu and the others worked at the stall on the last day of my contract?”

“No, they have been working every day since the day you got abducted. Their myam dish isn’t as tasty as yours, so they only sold [Kiba burgers].”

The contract of my stalls ended three days ago. I never imagined that Leina Wu and the others actually signed a new contract with Milano Mast on the next day and started selling [Kiba burgers] by themselves.

More surprising of all, they even negotiated business with Neil and Naudiz and catered for their inns. They couldn’t replicate my cooking, so they only sold the kiba Tau sauce soup made by Leina Wu.

“Asuta will definitely come back. That’s why we need to protect the relationship Asuta had built with the Post Station Town... Leina Wu seemed to have said that. After finishing her work, she also joined the search party.”

“I see...”

“...This could only be done by Leina and the others who are chefs. Leina Wu might be young, but she is very capable.”

Ai Fa rested her chin on her propped up knee and said thoughtfully:

“Anyway, we searched the entire area outside Genos city. We followed Kaslan Lutim’s

plan; if the people in the city refuse to let us search inside the city, we can only show them that the villains aren't hiding in the Post Station Town, farmlands or the Turan region."

"That's amazing. Sixty people is a lot, but Genos is massive, right?"

"Yes. But the faces of the villains have already been exposed, and they had prominent features. The guards appeared to be conducting their search diligently too, and we completed the search last night. We could finally say for certain that the villains are either in the city or have left Genos."

Ai Fa lowered her gaze as she said that, as if she was trying to conceal her face.

She probably did so unconsciously. Her clenched fist was trembling, as if she was recalling the despair she felt back then.

"As Kaslan Lutim said, no matter how suspicious Pyschkurewuss may be, we had no evidence and needed to find another way. There are some who think this is a conspiracy to bait the denizens of Forest's Edge into breaking the law. Others opined that this was a trap set by someone like Geta, who holds a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge and Pyschkurewuss."

After the truth was unveiled, it turned out to be the doing of Pyschkurewuss' daughter.

No one expected this from the young tyrant. Her actions were reckless and lacked foresight, so no one suspected such a foolish ploy.

"...In any case, my original plan was for half the people to search outside Genos and the other half to head for the city. We were ready to not budge until the guards let us in."

That was when Geta showed up.

In the morning, Geta waited at the road connecting the Forest's Edge to the Post Station Town and relayed my message to Donda Wu.

There were some who wanted to rush into the city since my location was known, while others felt they should prioritize the law; opinions were split between these two camps. As we were debating this, Zashuma arrived for his periodic report.

“And that noble named Polarse was brought up for some reason. Who is he?”

“Well... Zashuma called him the ‘last resort’. Kamyua Yost left instructions that if anything happened and Malfreed’s assistance was needed, he should look for that noble.”

“Huh? So, aside from Malfreed, that man is an aristocrat who will help us?”

“Yes. Zashuma wasn’t too keen on it either. But since Asuta returned home safely, that was the right choice.”

Ai Fa said while in deep thought:

“Speaking of which, he commented on Polarse with a phrase that is rarely used...”

“What? That sounds serious.”

“Ah, I remember.”

Ai Fa clapped her hands, which wasn’t like her usual style.

“This is what Zashuma said: ‘That man is unscrupulous in his pursuit of profits.’ This means he is only working to further his own ends, correct?”

“Yes, it is normally used to describe being greedy in making money.”

But that didn’t seem to fit that innocent looking young man at all. Was he after the tribute of the denizens of Forest’s Edge? But the wealth we could afford to give wouldn’t be worth the risk of earning Pyschkurewuss’ ire. Just what was he scheming?

“Money, huh. No matter how valuable money is, it can’t be traded for lives of our precious tribemates.”

Ai Fa leaned over as she said:

“That’s all I want to say, do you understand?”

“Yes. There are still many things that bother me, but let’s leave that for tomorrow.”

Ai Fa stopped before me, tilted her head, and said: "Tomorrow?"

"Asuta, what are you planning to do tomorrow?"

"Well, Pyschkurewuss said he will apologize tomorrow afternoon, right? I can't move around freely before this matter is wrapped up, but I wish to apologize to the innkeepers again."

"Alright, we just need to give a heads up to the tribal chiefs first. So... Let's sleep early to prepare for tomorrow. Normally, we would have turned in by now."

Indeed, there was a commotion after the dinner at dusk, we then came back to the Forest's Edge, made a detailed report at the Wu clan village, and got caught up in a banquet-like uproar... Four or five hours should have past since sunset. This was the first time I stayed up late like this in Forest's Edge.

"Alright, let's turn in then. Erm... Ai Fa..."

"What is it? If you want to apologize, I already told you there's no need for that."

Ai Fa held onto my left arm tightly with pouting lips.

"Protecting you was Shin Wu's job. Shin Wu is the one who failed at his task, not you."

"Yes, but I promised you that I will return safely..."

"Aren't you back here, safe and sound now?"

Ai Fa held on more tightly as she spoke.

"Enough, don't make me talk about my feelings so much. If I let down my guard... I will show my unsightly side."

Ai Fa then leaned against the wall while hugging my arm and rested her head on my shoulder.

"Let's sleep then."

“L-Like this?”

“I don’t want to sleep apart from you tonight. Think of this as punishment for making me worry.”

“Erm, that’s...”

Ai Fa opened her eyes wide and looked at me as I answered her troublingly.

“...But before that, there is something I have to do.”

Ai Fa picked up her saber and got up slowly. There were anger and hostility in her eyes.

“W-What’s the matter? Could it be...”

“We have a guest. Asuta, stay sharp.”

Ai Fa took large strides towards the entrance, passed the right side of Gilulu, who had curled up into a ball and slept, and took off the door bar crudely. She moved more hastily compared to Geta’s visit several days earlier.

She said sharply into the darkness: “Retard, you still dare show your face before me?”

I frantically rushed to Ai Fa’s side and looked at the visitor over her shoulder.

There was a tall and slender cloaked figure standing quietly in the dark... It was Sanjura, who I had not seen these few days.

“Long time no see, Asuta.”

He took off his hood, revealing his easterner face and rarely seen combination of brown hair and reddish brown eyes.

“You must be very angry. Before going to the guard house, I wanted to pay you a visit.”

“The guard house? Are you going to turn yourself in and accept the punishment?”





Ai Fa's voice was filled with incredible rage.

In contrast, Sangjura's face had a gentle smile.

"Crime... My sincere apologies; there's something more important to me than law, and I prioritizing that."

"Enough talk, you madman. You... betrayed Asuta's trust and friendship." Ai Fa said quietly with her hand tightly on her hilt. "Asuta is at fault for trusting a man like you too, but that doesn't excuse your sin of betraying Asuta."

"You can hate me. But I think, I made best choice. Moose will abduct Asuta, no matter what. If I didn't help, Asuta might be in greater peril."

"Sangjura, are you Pyschkurewuss'...or Lifuria's servant?"

Ai Fa was blocking the entrance, so I could only speak over her shoulder.

Sangjura nodded with a smile:

"Yes. I serve, Pyschkurewuss. But... Lifuria, more important."

"Is that so... So you got close to me on Pyschkurewuss' orders, right?"

"Correct. Ten days ago, I was summoned from Banam. But my right hand hurt, so I got assigned to surveil on Asuta's work."

Sangjura said as he raised his bandaged right arm over his head.

"If right hand not hurt, I would be given more violent job. So I... stab my right hand first."

"What did you say? Just what are you thinking?"

Ai Fa asked him angrily, and Sangjura answered with a smile:

"I, only think of Lifuria. Making her wish come true, left bad memory for Asuta. I came to apologize."

“Why? Why is someone like you working for Pyschkurewuss...”

“I, can’t defy Pyschkurewuss.”

The corners of Sangjura seemed gloomy as he said that:

“I also feel, Pyschkurewuss most hateful man in world. But, I cannot oppose. So, I decided to stop hating Pyschkurewuss and instead love Lifuria.”

I didn’t understand at all.

Sangjura shook his head gently and put on his hood again.

“I want be questioned together with Moose. I, probably not sentenced to death. But... I made Pyschkurewuss lose face, so he must think I useless. And then, I want to live for Lifuria.”

“What are you talking about? I don’t understand your actions at all! Since you hate Pyschkurewuss so much, you should cut off all ties with him! If you leave Genos, Pyschkurewuss can’t do anything to you, right?”

Sangjura seemed to be smiling under his hood.

It was the incredibly gentle smile that I really liked.

“No one, believe me anyway. As I said, Pyschkurewuss won’t acknowledge me either. Asuta, sorry for doing something so terrible to you.”

At this moment, several figures appeared around Sangjura.

Sangjura didn’t even look at them and said calmly:

“I, am Pyschkurewuss’ son. Lifuria, is my sister from a different mother. So... I can’t cut ties with him.”

“What...”

“I, will go to the guard house. I ask the denizens of Forest's Edge, not direct your hate towards Lifuria. I, wish no harm on the denizens of Forest's Edge. I, like your pure

souls.”

“...Being liked by a man like you will only bring us trouble.”

Someone standing behind Sangjura barked angrily.

It was Ludo Wu.

Shin Wu and two youths walked out from the shadows of the night. They were the escorts who guarded me five days ago.

“Don’t say that you are going to the guard house, aren’t you here to wreak havoc? We won’t take it lying down this time.”

“...I, don’t want conflict with you.”

Sangjura removed the sheath at his waist and tossed it to Shin Wu’s feet. Ludo Wu clicked his tongue and stomped the ground.

“Tie his hands up and bring him to see my father before taking him to the guard house in town. Asuta, Ai Fa... Sorry, but can you lend us your wagon?”

And then, Sangjura was escorted away by Ludo Wu’s group and disappeared from our sight.

Ai Fa then sighed in relief and banged on the door.

“Just what kind of person is that man? I can’t trust him after all.”

“But...”

“Enough about that. Since he is the one responsible for your abduction, he is an enemy.”

Her rage had subsided, but Ai Fa was still looking at me agitatedly.

“Don’t sympathize with him. Asuta, at least for the time being, we will walk different paths from that man.”

“For the time being, huh.”

Ai Fa had her own views too.

She pouted exaggeratedly and then embraced my left arm again.

“We will worry about that tomorrow! And now, we will sleep!”

“Uwah!”

Ai Fa pulled at me mercilessly, and I fell directly onto the floor.

But Ai Fa didn’t let go, and her blonde hair that had a sweet scent spread all over my chest.

Ai Fa’s warmth, Ai Fa’s weight.

I could feel the rough texture of the kiba hide beneath me. The dim light from the candle stand and the exposed wooden ceiling. I have returned to the Forest's Edge... This feeling spread slowly across my entire body.

“I loved my beloved father, but Asuta is with me now.”

A while later, Ai Fa said with a voice without any inflection:

“He might have a detestable father, but Sangjura also has a cute sister, so he isn’t too pitiful.”

Ai Fa muttered and seemed to have closed her eyes. Finally, a voice that was barely audible went right into my heart:

“Everyone needs someone they can rely on. With someone like that... they can live strongly through any hardships.”

I replied quietly: “That’s right.”

I couldn’t resist the urge to put my right hand on Ai Fa’s head. Ai Fa moaned happily and rubbed her cheeks against my chest.

And so, these five long days finally ended.

# Mid-Meal Snack

## 1

Today, the Genos Post Station Town was in an uproar since morning.

The reason was obvious. The Forest's Edge denizen Asuta was abducted yesterday.

Yumi learned of this news while she was helping out at her family's inn. She thought it was an unfunny joke at first, but her mind was then filled with rage and sadness, which made her dull-witted. Even so, she still got in contact with her besties in town and scoured the town until the sunset. But she couldn't find Asuta.

One night has passed, but she still couldn't calm down. Before realizing it, she was instructed to serve lunch to customers and had been standing in a daze inside the kitchen all the while. But a fire that was as strong as a brazier burned in her heart.

Yumi's family operated an inn called the <West Wind Inn>. It was an old budget inn where the delinquents and the poor frequented. The place wasn't big, but quite a number of guest lodged here. Yumi grilled meat and vegetables for these customers as she planned on her action for the day.

"Sigh, things have been hectic in town; just buying some groceries is such a pain."

Her mother returned with a large sack.

"Hectic? You mean the search for the culprit who abducted Asuta?"

Yumi asked immediately, and her mother shook her head as she placed the sack on the table:

"No, it's the denizens of Forest's Edge coming to town one after another. The guards ran to them in a panic when they saw them, and it caused quite a commotion."

"Are the denizens of Forest's Edge trying to enter the city?"

“No, they seemed to be here to search for their tribemate. If they try to enter the city, they will definitely get into a fight with the guards.”

Yumi sighed in relief and answered: “Is that so.”

There seemed to be some conflict between the denizens of Forest's Edge and the nobles in the city. Asuta was kidnapped at a time like this, so it wouldn't be strange that they felt this was the doing of the nobles. But it was against the law to enter the city without an entry pass. Yumi was relieved that the denizens of Forest's Edge didn't do that.

“I bought the fuwano. After setting up the hotpot, I will leave this to you too.”

“Ehh? There's something I have to do later.”

“What is it? There are guards and denizens of Forest's Edge everywhere; you can't go out during a time like this.”

“But, I can't just leave Asuta alone!”

Yumi retorted, and her mother looked at her worriedly:

“This can't be helped. If the culprit really is a noble, no one can judge them. It's a pity; I will never forget the denizens of Forest's Edge and the kiba dishes.”

“Why!? Mother, you think Asuta's kiba is delicious too, right!?”

Yumi was trying to persuade her parents to sell kiba dishes in the <West Wind Inn>.

Yumi's mother who ate the kiba cooking together with her had no objections. The one against it was her father. But Yumi didn't give up, and her father was finally willing to meet Asuta. But this commotion poured all her efforts down the drain.

“But, we can't defy the nobles. If the people in the city set their sights on us, our small inn will get torn down.”

“That's impossible! Are you saying the nobles can do whatever they want!?”

“Only a noble can sentence a noble. We can’t do anything.”

Yumi became filled with rage and hit the floor with the firewood in her hand.

“I will never give up! How can I allow the noble to abduct Asuta!?”

“Ah, Yumi, wait...”

“The pot is boiling! Mum, go cook the fuwano!”

Yumi yelled as she dashed out of the kitchen. She headed right for the door and went out onto the streets. This was the notorious slums of the Post Station Town, even the guards wouldn’t venture here. But to Yumi who grew up here, this was like her backyard.

Genos was a prosperous city. To outsiders, there were few cities in the west that could match it in wealth. However, all the wealth was concentrated inside the city, and people starving to death inside the slums were not uncommon.

The city was protected by rock walls taller than a house, and the inside and outside of the wall were worlds apart. Yumi wouldn’t ever have the chance to enter the city, and the nobles in the city would never set foot in the slums. For those dwelling in the slums, the aristocrats were like clouds in the sky.

*But even so, I won’t permit this.*

Yumi thought as she ran through the streets.

This was the main street passing right through the middle of the Post Station Town. Big houses and shops could be seen everywhere, and many people had gathered here so early in the morning. The business ran by the people here brought quite a substantial amount of wealth to Genos.

However, things were different today. Like what her mother said, there was a dangerous air here. Plenty of guards were around this street, and she could see many denizens of Forest’s Edge wearing kiba capes.

There wasn’t any confrontation yet, but the atmosphere was tense. Innocent merchants and travelers afraid of being caught in between them quickly walked away



with their head low.

*...This... is just like that time.*

That time when the great villain of Forest's Edge caused an uproar in the Post Station Town.

There was an uneasy air in the town back then too. It continued to linger until the great villain redeemed for his crime with his life.

*Damn it! Thanks to Asuta, the atmosphere had gotten so much better...*

Yumi grit her teeth as a familiar face walked over from the other side of the street. He was the son of a family running a bar, and one of her besties.

“Yo, what took you so long? Your Dad stopped you?”

“After I got in a big fight with my Dad in the morning, we didn’t talk at all. What’s up in town...?”

“Nothing much. As you can see, the guards and the denizens of Forest's Edge are on edge, but things are much calmer than earlier.”

“Is that so. What about Asuta’s kidnappers...? Any clues?”

“I visited a few taverns but didn’t see any suspicious characters. If he was taken away by the nobles... Shouldn’t he be in the rock walls?”

Yumi stamped her feet: “Damn it!”

“Is there any way to get inside the rock walls? Do you know any businessman inside the city?”

“Why would people from prim and proper shops be associated with someone like me? You want to climb the wall? You will get stabbed by the lances.”

Yumi bit her lips and looked at the streets. The place was rowdy unlike the slums, but those doing business here were just commoners. They wouldn’t dare defy the guards, much lest the nobles.

However, there seemed to be an incident between the townsfolk of the Post Station Town and the guards yesterday. The vegetable stall owner and innkeeper Asuta knew very well went to the guard house and said they knew who abducted Asuta.

Thanks to them, the culprits were put on wanted posters right away. The innkeeper from the <Cryptic Venerable Inn> who was with Asuta back then saw how the criminals looked like. Yumi searched until nightfall with the wanted poster... but failed to obtain any lead.

Her bestie looked at Yumi who was trembling with regret:

“Erm, anyway, let’s grab a bite first. I had been working since morning, I’m famished.”

“Ah, then go eat something. I don’t feel like eating.”

“Are you alright? You will miss out of the kiba dishes if you dally too much.”

Yumi glared unconsciously at him.

“Asuta isn’t here, so why even mention kiba dishes? Are you drunk so early?”

“Don’t look at me with such scary eyes. The denizens of Forest’s Edge are still running the stall without Asuta.”

Yumi was shocked.

She felt something similar to charcoal fire burning in her chest.

“They still have the luxury of running the stalls? Is money more important than Asuta?”

“I don’t know that. Go ask them yourself.”

“...Got it. Let’s go and ask.”

Yumi headed north. The marketplace was to the north of the main street, and the stalls were located in the northern end.

On her way there, she didn’t run into any denizens of Forest’s Edge. Many of the

hunters were here, but their numbers were just a few dozens. Their apparent lack of concern for Asuta made her feel really mad.

A short while later, she saw a crowd before her.

Business was booming as usual, with most of the customers from Jaguar or Semu. Twenty percent of the people were from Selva, so the ratio remained the same.

Yumi suppressed her boiling emotions and queued up with her bestie.

“Welcome, that will be two copper plates.”

When it was Yumi’s turn, the girl tending to the stall greeted her.

“Hey, you...”

Yumi said with a scary voice halfway before she held her breath.

At the stall were Vena Wu and a raven-haired girl who came to change shifts. She didn’t look like Vena Wu, even though she was Vena Wu’s sister. That girl looked really young, but her features were proportionate. She was putting on a smile, but her eyes were red and swollen from crying.

“Ahh... You are the daughter of an inn that patronizes us regularly, right? Thank you very much for your continued support.”

“Huh? Ah, yes...”

“Could I make them one at a time for you? It will be done soon.”

That girl said as she made the [Kiba burger] nimbly.

Yumi took the hamburger, paid the money, and then stood beside the stall.

“Erm, why are you still running the stalls?”

“Huh?”

That girl looked at Yumi quizzingly.

However, the next customer paid her copper plates, so she couldn't answer Yumi. A red-headed girl from the other stall strolled over. She had been helping out at the stall since a long time ago and was called Lala Wu. She was also Vena Wu's younger sister.

"Leina-nee, I will take over your shift. It must be tiring for you to search in town, right?"

"Yes, thank you. I will leave this to you then."

The dark-haired girl named Leina switched places with her sister and then walked to Yumi. She was a member of the Wu clan, so her full name should be Leina Wu. Leina Wu bowed at Yumi.

"Sorry for the commotion in town. We have no intentions of antagonizing the townsfolk, please believe us."

"Ah, yes. I'm not doubting you... But Asuta had already been abducted, so why are you still continuing with the business?"

"I don't think we should let the relationship Asuta built up crumble. Before Asuta returns, we, the Wu clan, hope to maintain the bonds we have built with the townsfolk."

*Before Asuta returns...* The incredible warmth of these words entered Yumi's heart.

"Is that so; you have not given up on Asuta. I thought..."

Leina Wu said in a firm tone: "Asuta will definitely be back. Asuta has made it through many difficulties in the past too."

There was a strong gleam in her puffy eyes. No matter how young she was, this girl was still a denizen of Forest's Edge. Yumi didn't completely understand their sense of values yet.

"We will join in the search for Asuta after the stall closes. We need to prepare for tomorrow's work, so we don't have much time... But we want to do our part too."

"Yes, I understand. I will look around town too. I also want to find Asuta."

Leina Wu then smiled brilliantly.

“So you are helping too. As a denizen of Forest’s Edge, I want to thank you.”

“I want to thank you too.”

With that, Yumi bit the [Kiba burger] in her hand.

“Hmm, it’s good! It’s as good as the one Asuta made.”

“Thank you very much. But... the Wu clan has been the one making the [Kiba burger] for quite some time now.”

“Huh, is that so!?”

“Yes, but we need Asuta’s help to make [Myam-roasted meat], so both stalls are selling [Kiba burger] for today.”

“I see, that’s amazing! There won’t be any problems with the business then.”

“Yes. Even though an incident happened again, the number of customers isn’t falling at all. This is thanks to Asuta breaking tradition of the Forest's Edge about not building relationship with the people in town...”

The cloud of agitation in Yumi’s heart was gone. Now that she thought about it, a tribe as honest and simple as the denizens of Forest's Edge would never abandon Asuta who was their tribemate. Yumi felt ashamed of her stupidity.

“Please work hard! Do tell me if you find any clues!”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

Yumi waved at Leina Wu and went back with her bestie.

Her bestie who was eating a [Kiba burger] quietly all the while sighed:

“The women of Forest's Edge are all beauties. I almost lost myself after looking at that smile.”

“Hey, stop looking at the denizens of Forest's Edge with eyes like that!”

“What are you saying, Yumi? You are looking at Asuta with eyes like that too!”

“That’s nonsense! I’m not!”

Yumi suddenly kicked the butt of her bestie.

“In any case, let’s help too! Not just the inns, we will scour every corner where the culprits might be hiding!”

“That hurts... There’re already people taking care of that; the Post Station Town is really big, you know? It can’t be done in just a day or two.”

“Then we will just have to spend three to four days! Stop wasting time grumbling!”

“I’m not griping. I don’t want to leave Asuta in a pinch either.”

With that, her bestie popped the rest of his [Kiba burger] into his mouth.

Her bestie used to loathe the denizens of Forest's Edge. When Asuta first started his business in the Post Station Town, Yumi and he went to stir trouble at Asuta’s stall.

Before realizing it, they already became regulars at Asuta’s stall and were running around town for Asuta’s sake. That was the effect of the bonds Asuta erected with the townsfolk.

*I won't let his stall go broke because of this.*

Yumi perked herself up, and her bestie who was walking with her grunted.

“Someone is already walking along this street. Let’s meet up with them first. Yumi, want to take a look at the ‘Drunkard’s alley’?”

“Ah, it will be dangerous for non-locals to go there.”

'Drunkard’s alley' was a street in the deepest part of the slums. Yumi and her besties had to muster their courage before heading in there.

“But Yumi, will you be fine alone? Do you need to call more guys?”

“We will be marked if we get too many people. I’m the quickest in running, so don’t worry.”

“Alright, see you in a while.”

Her bestie jogged down an alley. Yumi also turned around after finishing her [Kiba burger]. She was reluctant to visit 'Drunkard’s alley', but it was a place she had to go if she wanted to search for the kidnappers.

As Yumi made her way back to the slums; she was shocked to find denizens of Forest's Edge trying to head down the slums’ alley.

“W-Wait! Where are you going?”

The two denizens of Forest's Edge turned back and looked at her. One was a hunter wearing the hide of a kiba, while the other was dressed in the typical fashion of a Forest's Edge woman. The male hunter was tall and buff, while the woman was smaller but plump.

“...I’m sorry, but you are?”

“I-I’m Yumi of the <West Wind Inn>. You better stay away from there. That’s the nest of hooligans who drink in the day!”

“Nest of hooligans... Even more reason for me to search that place.”

The bulky body of that man was intimidating, but his voice was calm. His face didn’t look scary either, and looked polished and competent like his body. His clear eyes and gentle expression gave the impression of a reliable old man.

“...I know the denizens of Forest's Edge are confident in their abilities, but the people lurking there are dangerous. You don’t want to cause any incident in town, do you?”

“Yes, but we have to search all the places in town. If not, we won’t be able to convince the people in the city.”

“Convince? What do you mean?”

“We intend to prove that Asuta isn’t outside the city. We will then negotiate with the nobles and request for permission to search the inside of the city.”

After saying that, the Forest's Edge hunter suddenly smiled:

“I forgot to introduce myself. I’m a denizen of Forest's Edge, Kaslan Lutim of Lutim house. This is my younger sister, Molum. Thank you for your concern, Yumi from the <West Wind Inn>.”

That was how Yumi met Kaslan Lutim.

And that drew open the curtain of the small adventure they had on that day.

## 2

Yumi and the denizens of Forest's Edge walked together into the slums. They had just entered, so the scenery didn’t look much different. By the way, since there were more guard patrols than usual, the residents in the slums were all staying home cautiously.

“This is the part of the Post Station Town where the very impoverished and problematic people live. Even the guards don’t dare venture here alone.”

“Is that so. It looks no different from the street outside.”

“This is just the outer edge of the slums. You need to be more careful as you go further in.”

Yumi said as a familiar sign appeared before her. That was Yumi’s home, the <West Wind Inn>. Yumi moved quickly and used Kaslan Lutim’s huge body to hide herself.

“Sorry, let me hide for a while. If my parents see me, they will want me to go home.”

“You are helping Asuta despite your parent’s objection?”

“Of course, isn’t that what friends do?”

Kaslan Lutim narrowed his eyes gently and checked Yumi out.



“Yes; to us, Asuta is an irreplaceable friend. I’m glad to know that the townsfolk think so too.”

“It’s embarrassing if you say that so seriously.”

Yumi hid behind Kaslan Lutim as they walked past the <West Wind Inn>.

Before long, they reached a junction. From here onwards, the houses looked sloppily built. The residents here was probably too poor to afford repairs to their buildings.

“Walk down this street; I had already investigated the area around here.”

“That’s a big help. Molum and I were planning to spend this entire day to search this place.”

“But the problem is the 'Drunkard’s alley' ahead. A bunch of unreasonable hooligans is there.”

Yumi said as she glanced at the other member of their group.

“Are you fine with this? This isn’t a place a young girl like you should be going.”

“Aren’t you a young girl too?”

The girl named Molum Lutim smiled innocently. She was a very cute girl, unlike her brother. She was a little plump, but more charming than skinny girls. She had bright eyes and her round cheeks looked very soft.

“I’m fifteen. Yumi, how old are you?”

“Me? I’m sixteen.”

“Sixteen, huh. You look very mature.”



In the Post Station Town, sixteen wasn't considered a child anymore. Yumi's parents were already looking for a prospective match for her.

"If you are fifteen, your brother isn't much older, right?"

"I'm twenty-four. There are five siblings in the Lutim main house; I'm the eldest and Molum is the youngest."

"Five siblings, huh. Since the Wu clan is like that too, there are many kids in the Forest's Edge!"

"Yes, having many children is an important job for the denizens of Forest's Edge too."

For Yumi, talking to a hunter of Forest's Edge was a rare experience.

"By the way, how many of your tribemates are in town?"

"About sixty. A man is paired up with a woman; we are searching the Turan region to the north of the city, the Post Station Town, and the southern farmlands."

Sixty denizens of Forest's Edge being in town was a huge thing. With half of them being buffed Forest's Edge hunters, the townsfolk must be spooked.

But Yumi didn't have any problem with that.

"Aren't there hundreds of denizens in Forest's Edge? Only sixty of you came?"

"Yes. There were many who wanted to take part in the search for Asuta, but I stopped them. Only the Wu clan and their kin are resting for the hunting offseason right now, so after excluding the elderly and children, only sixty of us came to town."

"Hunting offseason?"

"Yes, the hunters of Forest's Edge rest three times every year. The Wu clan's kin just happened to be in the offseason."

"Is that so."

Yumi thought about ending the topic, but she couldn't stop herself.

“Sorry, I want to ask. Compared to Asuta, is the hunting work... more important?”

“Yes, we are afraid of the nobles in the city finding fault with us if we neglect to hunt kiba.”

“...Are you afraid of the nobles?”

“Yes, we are suspecting that the goal of this incident is to expose the weak points of the Forest's Edge.”

The denizens of Forest's Edge were ordered by the nobles in Genos to perform the tedious job of hunting kiba. If they neglected this work, they would have no excuse if the nobles find fault with them.

“This sound complicated. Who is the noble behind this incident...?”

“It's not clear yet. Maybe it's the work of someone trying to pit the denizens of Forest's Edge against the nobles.”

“Well, I won't be surprised if there really is a retard like that. However... Thanks to Asuta, the thinking of the townsfolk had changed.”

Yumi sighed, and looked up at the tall Kaslan Lutim:

“It's a pity that this had to happen now. Maybe... the townsfolk will start fearing the denizens of Forest's Edge again.”

“It's possible. However, there are still people like you who are concerned about the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

Kaslan Lutim said with a gentle smile.

“The townsfolk didn't yell at us to ‘scram on back to Forest's Edge’, and there are many things that feel different too. I think the people in town are becoming more and more discontent towards the nobles.”

“Well, that's true. No matter what, Asuta was abducted by bad guys this time. Anyone who finds fault with the denizens of Forest's Edge must be sick.”

“...I’m glad that you feel that way.”

As Kaslan Lutim answered her in an even tone, they reached another junction.

Yumi stopped and looked at the siblings who didn’t resemble each other.

“This way leads to the notorious 'Drunkard’s alley'. I want to ask again, are you sure you don’t want to let me handle this alone?”

“Yes. Since this is a suspicious place, we want to verify it personally.”

“Alright. To be frank, I can’t search every part of this place on my own, so I’m grateful for your help... But be careful, alright? This is definitely more dangerous than the Post Station Town.”

Kaslan Lutim nodded without saying anything.

He showed no fear at all. With this powerful hunter here, the hooligans in the 'Drunkard’s alley' might just be flying like rats.

“Let us be off then. Keep your guard up.”

With that decided, Yumi headed down the alley.

The wooden buildings on either side looked more and more run down. Those who had seen prosperous streets would feel this is a wreckage. There was a sour smell in the air, and the stench seemed to have taken root here.

“It’s quiet. But at the same time... I can feel the gazes of many people upon us.”

“Hmm. They are probably peeking because strangers are here.”

Yumi shrugged and headed to a house nearby. She knocked, and a scary voice responded: “What is it?”

“We are looking for someone. If it’s not too much trouble, can I ask some questions?”

The door was shut, but it was rotten and had holes everywhere. A pair of eyes peeked

outside from one of the holes.

"You are already troubling by calling me. I don't know what you want, but go find someone else."

The occupant seemed to be an elderly woman. Her brown eyes had the light of suspicion and wariness.

"Don't say that and just hear me out. Both of us live in the same vicinity after all."

"...A girl dressed like you must be from the outside."

"No way, I'm the daughter of the <West Wind Inn> just further down the street, isn't that around this area?"

The old lady behind the door narrowed her eyes.

"<West Wind Inn>, huh. Can you tell me the name of the innkeeper?"

"Of course I know my Dad's name. He is Samus, his wife is Shiru. Actually, my Dad married into the family."

There was a loud noise of the door bar being opened. Even a rundown door like this had a lock.

"You are the daughter of that Shiru? You are pretty, unlike your mother."

"How rude. Never mind, I take after my father."

"Fufu, that Shiru's daughter. Who are you looking for, and who are these people...?"

"These are denizens of Forest's Edge. Grandma, you should know about the denizens of Forest's Edge, right?"

Kaslan Lutim and Molum Lutim bowed without a word. The old lady watched their quiet demeanor and grunted.

"This is the first time I'm seeing a 'kiba eater' from so close up. Why did you bring them here?"

"I already said that I'm looking for someone. Asuta who was abducted from the main street and the culprit who kidnapped him. Erm, Asuta has dark hair and eyes, a 17 years old boy who looks a little cute. The kidnappers..."

Yumi stopped here, and Kaslan Lutim continued:

"The kidnappers are a dark-skinned man who looks like an easterner and a stout westerner man. The two of them are wanted on suspicion of kidnapping by the Post Station Town."

"Hmmp. There are many delinquents around here, but I have never seen an easterner wander here."

"More specifically, he is a mixed blood between the east and the west. His name is Sangjura; he has brown hair and eyes that looked different from easterners."

"Never seen him. Go ask Dataz."

"Dataz? Who's that?"

"The delinquent head that runs this place. Any outsiders who want to live here have to meet him first."

"I see, thank you."

Kaslan Lutim bowed, and that old lady closed the door without a second look at them.

"...Where might that Dataz be?"

"W-Wait. You want to visit his place? The head of the 'Drunkard's alley' isn't some nice guy, you know?"

"But, it will be faster than searching the houses one at a time."

Yumi sighed and then scratched her long hair.

"Alright then. I believe in your capabilities, okay? Hey, grandma...! Where can we find that scoundrel Dataz?"

“It’s the building with a red roof in the center of the street!”

A crude voice answered from the house.

They walked down the street with that in mind and found a house that matched that description. Painting houses with different colors wasn’t anything special, but this house was probably painted a long time ago. The blackish red looked like blood had been splashed on it and felt a little disgusting.

Yumi caught her breath and knocked the door of this creepy house.

“Is Dataz in? I want to ask something!”

There wasn’t any response for quite a long while.

Finally, the door opened with a creepy creak, and a large man taller than Kaslan Lutim appeared.

“Who are you...? What business do you have with Dataz...?”

“I want to ask if there had been any newcomers lately.”

Yumi answered in a strong tone, which was the norm in the slums. You might lose your life if you show others your weak side.

“I’m Yumi from the <West Wind Inn> ; these two are denizens of Forest's Edge, Kaslan Lutim and Molum Lutim. I don’t want any trouble, I just want to ask some questions.”

“Denizens of Forest's Edge...?”

The large man looked at Kaslan Lutim uneasily.

Kaslan Lutim was a head taller than Yumi, while the large man was half a head taller than him. With his log-like limbs and bulging tummy, he was one size fatter than Kaslan Lutim.

Before that man could say anything else, an energetic voice came from the meshed windows.



“Hey, let them in! I want to see those denizens of Forest's Edge!”

The large man stepped back without turning around.

Yumi clenched her fists drenched in cold sweat and led the way in.

The first thing she saw was a corridor. It was a long passageway that branched out to either side at the end. The large man headed to the right, and Yumi's group followed.

This house had a strange layout. That voice earlier came from a room facing the streets, but the entrance to that room was at the end of such a complicated corridor. She didn't really want to know why it was built this way.

“Welcome, dear guests. This is the first time I have invited denizens of Forest's Edge into my home.”

There were five men in the room. This was a room with a round table commonly found in bars, with several chairs around it. The one sitting in the innermost seat was the one who was speaking.

He had a small stature and was probably shorter than Yumi when standing. His limbs were slender and weak, his hair sparse, but his eyes were lively. He was probably older than Yumi's father.

“I'm the owner of this house, Dataz. What business do you have with me?”

Yumi didn't expect the need to introduce herself again and repeated what she said to the old lady said earlier.

“I see; a villain that looks like an easterner, huh. Recently... I heard someone like that is living around here, but don't remember him coming to greet me.”

“Really!?”

Yumi leaned forward with a start.

Dataz and the people around him laughed cheerfully.

“I won’t lie if it doesn’t benefit me or say any truth that might undermine myself.”

“You are saying you want a reward? I don’t have anything I can offer right now.”

“Is that so? It will be a problem if you don’t have the cash to spare.”

Yumi frowned and stepped forward as if she was protecting Molum Lutim.

“If you have any bad ideas, I suggest you stop. If you want my necklace or bangles, I can give them all to you.”

“I’m not interested in such trinkets. Well then, would you like to test your brute force?”

Dataz shrugged as he said that.

“But I don’t want to dirty my home with blood. How about a little strength competition?”

“Strength competition?”

“During festivals, aren’t there events where men compete with their strength? I have never won that before, but this guy is very confident in his muscles.”

And, of course, he was referring to the large man they met earlier. He was the only one staring at Kaslan Lutim without smiling.

“If you can win this guy, I will tell you where the villains are. If you lose. Let’s see... I will take the blade on your waist. That thing looks more useful than those cheap accessories.”

“Dataz, how about taking the kiba hide too? It can serve as proof of winning against a hunter of Forest’s Edge, and you can strut it around to show off.”

When he heard what one of his goons said, Dataz smiled arrogantly.

“That’s right. How about it, Forest's Edge hunter?”

“I’m fine with that; what is the win condition of the contest?”

Kaslan Lutim’s face didn’t change at all.

Dataz happily showed his lecherous eyes.

“There’s nothing complicated. The one who gets floored loses, got it?”

“That will be the same as our harvest festival then; I have no problems with that.”

Kaslan Lutim took off the sheathed blade on his waist and handed it to Molum Lutim.

“Is punching and kicking allowed? Those are banned in the competition within Forest's Edge.”

“That’s boring, what’s so good about watching people wrestle?”

“I’m fine with anything. It’s not all about being interesting.”

Kaslan Lutim was steady and calm. The large man’s face was a little red, probably agitated by how stoic Kaslan Lutim was.

“Alright, make some space! One match to settle it all! Well... You will be too exhausted to have a second match anyway.”

Following Dataz’s orders, the men pushed the tables and chairs to the side. Only Dataz remained seated as the space was cleared out in front of him.

Kaslan Lutim and the large man walked into the empty space. Yumi held Molum Lutim’s hand unconsciously, but Molum just smiled:

“Don’t worry; Kaslan-nii is one of the eight braves amongst the hunters of the Wu kin.”

Dataz lazily raised his arm above his head and then swung it down in a flash.

“Begin!”

The large man charged at Kaslan Lutim.

Kaslan Lutim’s kiba cape swayed gently.

And then... The next instant, the back of the large man slammed heavily onto the floor.

It wasn't clear what happened. Yumi could feel the impact from her feet as the large man groaned in pain.

"Are you alright? You are heavy, so that should be rather painful."

Kaslan Lutim asked out of concern, but that large man just kept groaning without a reply. On a closer look, half of his body had crashed through the flooring.

"I held back, so you shouldn't be hurt. Will you concede this victory to me...?"

Kaslan Lutim slowly turned to look at Dataz.

Dataz was standing stiffly there with his right hand swung down, staring with his eyes wide open like an astonished kid.

### 3

"The easterner villain is supposedly living in old lady Jill's rundown place." Dataz told them.

Kaslan Lutim was worried that they would pick more trouble with him, but the delinquents seemed to be stunned by Kaslan Lutim's display of extraordinary strength and were in awe.

He even gave a kind suggestion: "I don't know who they are, but since they aren't too cocky, I just leave them be. And... Semu aren't easy to deal with, so I don't want to mess with them. Be careful out there."

Kaslan Lutim searched for the place Dataz told them about as he asked Yumi:

"What did he mean by Semu being hard to deal with? I do know that Sangjura has prowess comparable to a Forest's Edge hunter though."

"Hmm? Isn't he referring to poison, not physical prowess? I heard that it takes ten swordsmen to take down one Semu."

"Poison, huh. That's really troublesome."

“That’s right. The Semu on the streets don’t look like bad guys, but I heard that they don’t need escorts when traveling around the continent. So they don’t fear bandits and beasts.”

As they were chatting, their destination appeared before them. There was only one straight path leading here, so they wouldn’t have missed it.

It was a rundown longhouse almost at the end of the 'Drunkard’s alley'. The single-story building was divided into six apartments and seemed to be on the verge of falling. It was so bad that no one would expect anyone to live here.

“But, isn’t Sangjura lodging in the <West Wind Inn> ? Maybe the villain staying here is someone else?”

“I don’t know. He might have made preparations ahead of time, since he was planning to create an incident at that inn.”

In any case, since they were already here, they went ahead to investigate. Yumi was as tense as during her visit to Dataz’s house and knocked the door on the outermost side.

A while later, there was still no response.

Yumi was about to knock again when the sound of a door bar being removed echoed out.

“Annoying, all the rooms are full.”

Yumi suppressed the surprise in her heart and answered: “Ahh, you are old lady Jill? We are not looking for rooms.”

She wasn’t surprised by Jill’s face, but the strange smell coming from the house. It was a sweet scent that made her dizzy, something Yumi had never smelled before.

“Is that Semu herbs? I heard you rented a room to an easterner recently?”

When she heard Yumi’s question, Jill frowned warily.

She was a petite lady who was very old. Her back was bent almost to a right angle, and

her right hand was holding a cane. Her sticky grey hair was combed back to over her head, and her yellowish skin had a tint of blackness like a whip.

“I’m just checking to see if that easterner is someone I know. Is he here?”

“...Someone you know? He said that he didn’t know anyone in Genos.”

“Did I get the wrong person? He had light-colored hair, which was uncommon for easterners.”

Worried that Sanjura might be using an alias, Yumi didn’t mention that name.

Jill frowned:

“...Whatever, just don’t cause any trouble. And who are they?”

“They are denizens of Forest's Edge. The tribe of kiba hunters living at the edge of the Mount Morga.”

Jill walked outside as if she was pushing Yumi away, and deftly closed the door with her cane.

“I won’t know if I don’t take a look. I will take this opportunity to collect tomorrow’s rent.”

“Thank you, that’s a big help.”

Yumi followed the old lady who was walking with unsteady steps.

They went the opposite direction to the innermost room. The old lady stabbed the door crudely with her cane.

“Hey, you have guests! And pay the rent for tomorrow too!”

No response.

Jill waited a while and then put her withered fingers on the door. It didn’t appear to be locked and was pushed open without any resistance.

It was pitch-black inside. There was also a strange smell in the air, but it had a hint of sweet and sourness. It was revolting, like the scent of a beast.

“Hey, is anyone there!? No good... It’s too dark, I can’t see anything.”

“Excuse me, let me take a look.”

Kaslan Lutim stepped forth, and Jill backed away docilely.

However, Kaslan Lutim said with his head tilted:

“Something like a screen is blocking the way, so I can’t see inside... I can feel a strange presence.”

“What do you mean by strange presence? I allow you to go in. If you see anyone, drag them out. It’s a pain if someone dies in my house.”

Kaslan Lutim nodded and marched fearlessly into the dark.

Jill who was watching him go made a quizzical grunt: “Huh?”

“What is it? What did you see?”

“Hmm? It’s too dark, I can’t see anything.”

Yumi and Molum Lutim strained their necks and looked into the darkness.

The windows were covered with curtains, making the inside as dark as the night. They could only see the back of Kaslan Lutim who was walking in.

“It’s too dark...”

Yumi was suddenly kicked on her back mid-sentence.

She stumbled onto the shoulders of Molum Lutim in front of her, and the two of them fell down at the entrance. At the same time, the place went dark as the door was closed.

“That hurts...! Hey, old lady, what are you doing!!”

Yumi propped herself up in a panic and groped for the door. But for some reason, the door refused to budge, as if it was a wall. Yumi felt a chill down her spine.

“Wait! Stop kidding around! Open up!”

“Yumi, be quiet... There’s something wrong here.”

Molum Lutim grabbed Yumi’s arm. At the same time, a strange noise screeched through the darkness. Then came the fluttering sound of cloth swaying in the wind. It sounded like a winged creature flying in the air.

Yumi hugged her head with a “Hyahh!”. She felt something brush pass her face.

“Molum! Keep your head down! These creatures are dangerous!”

Kaslan Lutim’s voice mixed together the noise of something smashing and the screech of the creature. Kaslan Lutim seemed to be battling those creatures in the dark.

“Escape outside! These creatures can discern our position even in the darkness!”

“The door has been closed! It is probably locked from the outside!”

“Got it! Please hold on!”

Sound of something flying above her head came in the dark. It wasn’t loud, but there was more than one creature. Yumi felt she was caught in a nightmare.

The sounds of fighting never ceased. Yumi groped and found Molum Lutim’s warm fingers, and held them tightly. She prayed to the western god that the nightmare would end soon.

“Molum! Don’t move!”

Kaslan Lutim came from their front.

And then something big flew over Yumi’s head, and the door was knocked open at the same time. It was Kaslan Lutim who jumped over Yumi and sent the door flying with a kick.



The heavy door crashed onto the other side of the street, and white light flooded in through the entrance. Guided by this light, Yumi and Molum Lutim escaped successfully.

After that, the armed Kaslan Lutim rushed to their back. He stood before Yumi and Molum who were sitting on the ground and swung his saber at the darkness in the room.

“Those... are probably creatures known as bats.”

“B-Bats?”

“Yes. I heard they appear sometimes at night in the Forest's Edge. Not only do they suck the blood of human and beasts, their fangs are also poisoned. A dangerous creature.”

But these winged beasts would never leave the darkness, it was their nature to fear the light.

“Molum, Yumi, are you bitten?”

“No, I just kept on swinging this around.”

Molum Lutim who replied with a smile was holding a stick. She was fending off the bats with her bat, but Yumi didn't notice that at all.

“Yumi, you were locked in there? Is the culprit that old lady Jill?”

“That's right! Where did that old lady go!?”

Yumi swept the area, but there was no one on the street. She seemed to have run away after locking Yumi's group in the room.

“Why did she set us up? Does he have a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge?”

“Ask her that yourself! Let's just go back to the house now!”

That old lady was using a cane and was unsteady in her steps, so she couldn't have run to another street. They went back to the house they were at before, but it had been

locked from the inside.

“So you are in there! Hey, old lady! You went too far! Do you have a grudge against us!?”

And, of course, there was no answer. Yumi clicked her tongue and then turned back and said to Kaslan Lutim:

“Hey! Break this door down!”

“Well... Kicking someone’s door down isn’t something that I like to do.”

“I don’t know what your fetish is; we can’t just leave that grandma alone, right!?”

With an apologetic face, Kaslan Lutim suddenly kicked the door. It fell off its hinges and flopped inside the entrance.

The first thing they saw was a vacant room with dirty flooring. To the left was a stove with a small pot on top. The stove wasn’t lit, but there was a sweet fragrance coming from the pot.

Looking in the opposite direction of the stove was a large drape, which was probably the entrance to another room.

Kaslan Lutim surveyed the area and then moved cautiously in that direction. Yumi and Molum Lutim followed closely behind while being wary of anyone outside.

With his right hand on the hilt, Kaslan Lutim grabbed the bottom of the drape with his left. He pulled it open in one shot, and the voice of the grandma screaming: “Hyahh!” came from inside.

It was Jill.

She was hiding in a corner of the small room with a pale face.

There was someone beside her. That man was wearing ragged and torn clothes, and trinkets covered his neck and arms... He was an easterner as old as Jill.

Half of his hair was white and had mixed together with his black hair, giving it a rust-like color. His black complexion was full of wrinkles, and he should be quite tall if he

stood up, but his build was as lanky as a bean pole.

“Ah, spare us! He is too weak and frail to commit any crimes! It’s too much to arrest him!”

Jill leaned onto the skinny easterner and started weeping. Yumi was disappointed after seeing that.

“So this old grampa is the easterner living here? We are looking for a young Semu that is still capable of misdeeds!”

“Huh? So you are not here to arrest him...?”

“Why would we hand over someone we didn’t know to the guards!? You are too quick at jumping to conclusions.”

As they chatted, the old Semu sat on the floor emotionlessly. The easterner thought it was shameful to show their feelings.

“I seem to have caused harm to others... Jill isn’t at fault, please have mercy...”

“I don’t think she is not at fault. One wrong step and the bats would have sucked us dry.”

“Those bats are caught to make medicine... We are really sorry...”

“Hmmp. This grandpa speaks western really fluently.”

He was also blind in one eye. His right black eye was serene, while his left was murky grey.

“We are looking for a criminal named Sangjura. Just in case, let me ask you this; have you seen such man? Light brown hair and eyes, claims to be mix blood between east and west, a young man who looks like an easterner.”

“I don’t know... I’m a sinner who is too disgraced to return to Semu again and has cut all ties with easterners... And I don’t know any west and east mixed blood...”

“Is that so, that’s a shame. That man abducted my good friend and is an unforgivable

criminal.”

“Abducted your friend... I see...”

The Semu old man said as he closed his right eye. He stared right at Kaslan Lutim with his murky grey eyes.

“Could it be... that ‘starless one’...?”

“...What did you just say?”

Kaslan Lutim furrowed his brows slightly. His ever calm eyes now had a gleam as sharp as a blade.

“...You are the ‘star of the hawk’ guarding the three-headed lion... You are facing an important turn of fate alongside the light and darkness brought by the ‘starless one’...”

“An important turn of fate.”

Kaslan Lutim muttered, as if he was savoring these words.

Yumi was completely lost.

“I can’t read the fate of the ‘starless one’ since he doesn’t have a star... The wheel of fate is still turning now... Even if you don’t catch a sight of him, the ‘starless one’ still lingers over your heads... When the clouds clear and the dust settles, you will meet him once again...”

With that, the old man rested the shoulder that Jill was grabbing onto the wall behind him.

“That’s all that I could see... I hope you can forgive Jill...”

“Alright, thank you for your kind words.”

Kaslan Lutim let go of his hilt, then turned and left. He removed the hand holding the drape up, and the two elderly people disappeared behind it.

“Let’s go back. There’s nothing to gain from staying here.”

“W-Wait. What was all that nonsense just now? Is that easterner an astrologist?”

“Yes. Another Semu astrologist also called Asuta the ‘starless one’. I don’t really understand astrology, but I couldn’t ignore it completely either... At the very least, it could ease some of the worries in my heart.”

Kaslan Lutim left Jill house and smiled gently under the bright sun.

“But we can’t just sit idly and wait for Asuta to come back. I want to finish my job.”

“Yes! Let’s check out the next street!”

“Alright.”

Kaslan Lutim nodded.

Yumi felt she had just woken from a nightmare. She finally recovered her energy as he looked at Kaslan Lutim’s warm smile.

## 4

Three days later, at night...

Yumi, Kaslan Lutim and the others gathered at the city gates.

Everyone was waiting for Asuta to come back.

The denizens of Forest’s Edge and the townsfolk all looked nervous. *Let Asuta return safely...* Everyone prayed for Asuta as they waited there worriedly.

“It will be fine. If what Geta said is true, we will definitely save him.”

Yumi who was standing beside Kaslan Lutim muttered softly, as if she was talking to herself.

Asuta was in the city. The one who abducted him was the daughter of Pyschkurewuss, who was forcing Asuta to cook for her... News of this had spread early this morning.

No one knew if that was true. But the denizens of Forest's Edge believed in it and formulated a plan. And now, Asuta's family member named Ai Fa went to Pyschkurewuss' manor together with a noble.

"We will wait outside the gate. Yumi, will you come too...?"

As expected, Yumi said to Kaslan Lutim:

"Of course. There's no reason for me to refuse... But, what happened?"

"Well, we want to let Pyschkurewuss know that the truth has spread outside the city. If we don't do this, he will brush off all of this."

Yumi didn't really understand, but she decided to accept his invitation. In the past few days, she learned how logical and sensible he was, and his intelligence could rival the people in town.

Many townsfolk who were told the same thing as Yumi gathered here. The guards surrounded them fearfully, but not a single person left.

The sun was already setting. A group was standing before the white rock walls with several torches flickering on the wall.

The drawbridge had been raised, and the gates— tightly shut. The rock walls were also surrounded by a deep moat, so the walls were some distance away. Yumi couldn't even throw a rock that far, and Asuta had been abducted there.

"Yumi-nee..."

A petite figure walked to Yumi's side. It was the daughter of the vegetable vendor, Tara. Yumi had met this kid at Asuta's stall several times.

"Asuta-niichan is alright, right? He will definitely come back, right?"

"He is fine. Asuta won't be beaten by such a small setback."

Yumi knelt down and nodded firmly.

Tara nodded with tears in her eyes and returned to her father.

Yumi stood up, and Kaslan Lutim said to her: "Don't worry. The noble Polarse is helping us, so the other side wouldn't do anything foolish."

He was staring right at the gates.

"In the end, only a noble can prosecute a noble. We did what we can."

"You are working hard now too. The effort of everyone here is necessary for us to tread on the right path. And... If we didn't cause such an uproar in the town, Polarse wouldn't have acted for us."

Kaslan Lutim had a steady smile as he looked at the gates.

"The denizens of Forest's Edge, Post Station Town, and the nobles in this city... Right now, all these groups are working together on the same side. This is the bridge built by Asuta."

"Yes, we will make Asuta cook delicious food for making us worry so much."

Yumi made a show of being strong. At this moment, what sounded like the death throes of beasts came from the darkness.

The drawbridge was lowered.

Yumi leaned forward unconsciously.

Creak, creak, creak... The bridge made dull thuds as it slowly lowered to the ground. The guards armed with spears watched the gathered mob closely, looking for any dangerous movements.

There was a thump as the bridge landed on the ground. At the same time, the gates opened and darkness like the maw of a monster appeared on the other side.

A creaking carriage then came out of the darkness. It was a large box carriage pulled by two Totos. One Totos rider flanked the left and right side of the carriage.

"Gulp..." Someone gulped.

It was completely silent. Everyone waited with bated breath, wondering if Asuta was safe. Yumi just realized her knees were shaking.

Kaslan Lutim said quietly: "Things will be fine..."

The Totos carriage stopped before traversing the entire bridge. It then turned around and headed back to the gate, leaving two figures behind on the drawbridge.

The crowd erupted in cheers.

One of these figures was definitely Asuta.

Yumi closed her eyes and offered thanks to the god of the west. This was the first time she offered such sincere prayers.

A heavy sound was mixed amidst the cheers. Yumi opened her eyes again and found Asuta and the other figure back on the ground, and the drawbridge raised.

Asuta was swarmed by a large crowd, with some embracing him and others wailing in tears.

"...Forest, thank you for your mercy."

She looked back at Kaslan Lutim when she heard that, and found him with his eyes closed, offering prayers to his god.

"Come, Yumi, go greet Asuta."

"Shouldn't you go meet up with him first?"

"I can take my time later. It's embarrassing to say this... But my legs are shaking."

"What a coincidence, me too."

Upon hearing Yumi's reply, Kaslan Lutim smiled. His smile was different from usual, and more childish and bashful.

"Yumi, thank you for taking care of me. I can finally tell you since Asuta is back safely..."



“Hmm? What is it?”

“When we were searching for Asuta together with Molum three days ago, it felt like I had turned back to a child; I had a lot of fun.”

Yumi opened her eyes wide in shock.

She then smiled at the bashful Kaslan Lutim.

“Really? Me too.”

After saying that, Yumi ran towards Asuta.

Asuta was laughing and crying at the same time. Yumi didn’t know what to say, so she just showed a brilliant smile with a thousand thoughts on her mind.

And so, Yumi and the others got back Asuta, someone who was irreplaceable to them.



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